



NICK CARTER WEEKLY

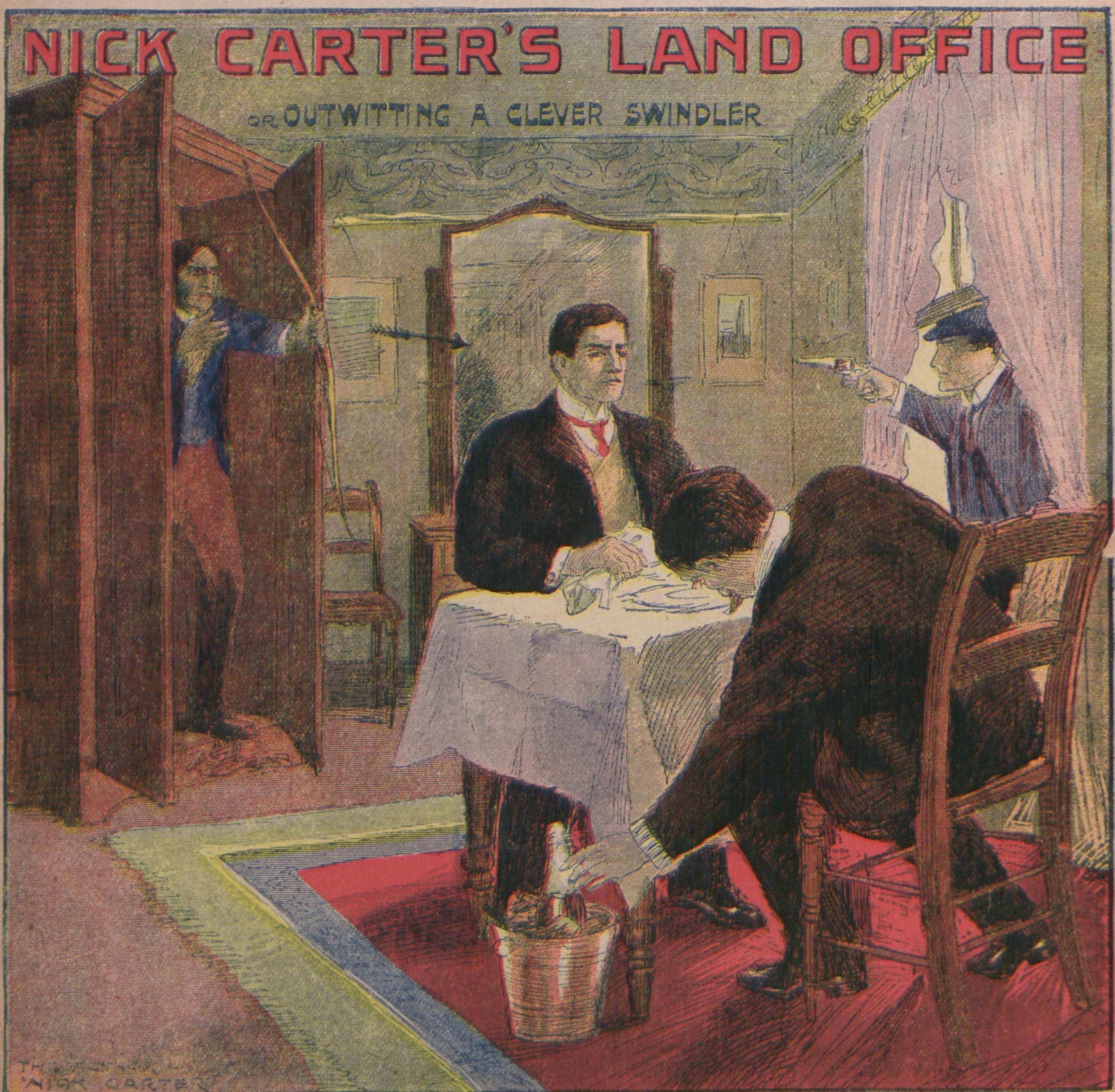
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No. 276.

Price, Five Cents.

NICK CARTER'S LAND OFFICE

or OUTWITTING A CLEVER SWINDLER



THE ADVENTURES
OF NICK CARTER

THE POISONED ARROW FLEW STRAIGHT TOWARD NICK'S HEAD.



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NICK CARTER'S LAND OFFICE;

OR,

Outwitting a Clever Swindler.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

OVER THE RAIL.

"You'll never live to tell your story!"

These words, with a savage oath, were followed by a sharp blow on the head that sent a man reeling along the deck.

It was on the steamer *Moccasin* early one Sunday evening in spring.

The *Moccasin* was bound from Jacksonville, Florida, to New York, and the voyage had been swift and pleasant.

At this hour Sandy Hook had been passed.

The passengers were gathered forward watching the lights of the city far up the bay.

They were going to land that evening, instead of the next morning, as they had supposed would be the case.

Hardly anybody was in sight on the after part of the vessel.

Evening dinner had been eaten, and the men employed in the cook's galley were cleaning up.

One sailor was on duty far aft, but between him and the forward deck where the crowd was, the only persons stirring were now and then a sailor, or a servant going to the rail to throw refuse and dirty water overboard.

The man on duty aft, having little to do, was watching an outgoing steamship that was passing the *Moccasin*.

So he did not see what happened on the main deck just abaft the galley gangway.

Even if he had not been watching the steamship he might not have seen it, for it was growing dark, the passage along the deck was narrow at that part,

and the galley-house nearly hid the two men from view.

One of these two was a man servant in the cook's employ.

By that is meant here not a regular member of the crew, but a poor man who was working his passage.

His name was John Foster.

He had come into Jacksonville the day before the steamer sailed and begged the captain to give him some kind of work, so that he might get to his home in the North.

Foster admitted that he was not a sailor, but he said he was willing to do any kind of work, shovel coal, scrub the decks, or wash dishes.

"I'm willing to sleep on a coil of rope and eat the leavings," he said.

The captain was a kind-hearted man, and, though he had all the crew he needed, he asked Foster how it happened that he was in such hard luck.

Foster told him some of his troubles, and the captain immediately decided to help him to go to the North, where he had lived until a few months before.

There was really little for him to do, but he was so anxious to work that he was kept busy in the cook's galley.

He peeled potatoes, scrubbed pans, mopped the floor, brought up coal, washed dishes, and never complained when other men put extra work on him.

It was John Foster who was addressed and struck as stated above.

He had been at his usual work after dinner, and had just left the galley to throw a pail of dishwater overboard.

A first-cabin passenger came hurrying along the narrow deck.

Foster heard him, but did not look up, for he had no suspicion that the man wanted anything of him.

He attended to his business, therefore, raising the pail and pouring its contents over the side of the ship.

The first he knew was when he got the blow on the head that caused him to stagger nearly to the open deck abaft the house.

He heard the words:

"You'll never live to tell your story!"

They came at the same time with the blow which blinded him, and, when he tried to turn and defend himself, he was so dazed that he could not see his enemy.

The pail had dropped from his hand and fallen into the water.

At the very instant when the blow came the captain of the *Moccasin* pulled the whistle cord to give a salute to the passing steamer.

The noise of the whistle drowned the scuffling of the men.

When the three blasts on the whistle were over, the scuffling had ceased.

And at that time there was only one man instead of two on the deck by the galley gangway.

That man was the cabin passenger.

He had followed up his first blow with another, given while Foster was still staggering.

Then he had lifted the half-unconscious man in his arms and dropped him over the rail.

Foster had tried to struggle; he tried to cry for help; but the passenger clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle a cry, and the blows had taken his strength and will power from him.

The passenger gave one glance over the rail.

He saw Foster sink beneath the surface like so much iron.

Then he swiftly crossed the open deck, went along the narrow passage on the other side and entered the saloon gangway.

He paused there a moment, got a drink at the water-cooler, and then went up to the upper deck forward, where he joined the crowd of passengers.

Before many minutes had passed the men in the cook's galley missed the good-natured cook's helper.

"What's become of Foster?" asked one.

The others looked around.

Nobody had seen him since they couldn't tell when.

He did his work so quietly that they seldom paid any attention to him.

It was only when they wanted Foster to do something that they thought of him.

At this moment the work of the day was pretty well finished.

"I reckon," said the chief cook, "that Foster's struck."

He smiled as he spoke.

"It's about time," added the assistant cook; "he's worked enough to pay for two passages."

"That's so. I wouldn't mind if we had him with us regularly."

Somebody suggested that probably Foster was on deck somewhere looking at the land.

That explanation of his disappearance satisfied them.

He was not one of the crew, and he would soon leave them, anyway; so it didn't matter if he did leave the galley a little earlier than had been expected.

And no one down there thought of him again until the following morning.

Meantime Foster's hard luck turned just a little.

An inbound schooner was a short distance behind the *Moccasin* at the moment when he was pitched over the rail.

On board the schooner were several young men who had been spending the day fishing.

They were now on their way home.

As they emptied more bottles than they had caught fish, they were in a jolly condition.

They were singing a rollicking chorus:

"Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea,
Dressed in—"

Here the fellow who was leading the singing stopped with a gasp of horror.

He had been looking at the water as he sang, and now his sunburned face became so white that the others were startled into sudden quiet.

"Great Scott! what's the matter?" asked one of his companions, in a half-whisper.

The leader pointed.

"I've got 'em," he stammered, "or I saw a dead man in there!"

Just then the schooner made a quick turn into the wind.

Most of the young men were thrown to the deck.

They scrambled up half-laughing, half-frightened, and demanded of the skipper to know what he meant.

The skipper's face was grim.

"There's a man out there," he answered, shortly; "I seed him driftin' past."

He gave orders to the one man who served as his crew, and that man got forward with a boathook.

"There he is!" he cried, a moment later.

The young men, now sobered, gathered at the side.

The man forward caught at the floating body with his hook, and the passengers pulled him aboard.

"He isn't dead!" cried one.

Another hastened to the cabin and brought out a bottle of whisky.

"What luck!" exclaimed one, "that we didn't drink it all!"

A dose of the hot stuff was forced into Foster's mouth, and the young fellows went to rubbing him violently.

"Turn him upside down!" yelled the skipper, from his place at the wheel.

They started to obey, but Foster was not suffering from drowning; he had taken in very little water.

The trouble with him was that he had been struck so hard—that was all.

He put out his hands rather feebly to show that he had understood the order and that it wasn't necessary.

"Feeling better?" asked one of the young men.

Foster looked sorrowfully at him.

"Are you Mr. Carter?" he asked.

"No," replied the young man, offering him more liquor, "but one name will do as well as another until we get acquainted, won't it?"

Foster shook his head and pushed away the bottle.

"I want to see Mr. Carter," he said, huskily—"Mr. Nicholas Carter, please."

"Gee!" exclaimed the young man, with a grin, "he thinks I'm the great detective. What do you think of that, fellows?"

"Nutty," answered one.

Foster looked at the last speaker.

There was more sense in his gaze now.

"I don't know but I am," he said, patiently; "I've been through enough to drive many a man into an insane asylum. And just now some fiend——"

He shuddered and looked around rather wildly.

He was beginning to remember the attack made against him on board the *Moccasin*.

The young men were certain now that he was a crazy man.

"It's all right," they told him; "you're among friends."

"No," he answered; "I haven't any, unless Mr. Carter will be good enough to help me. I want to find him. Are we near New York?"

"Yes; this is the lower bay."

"Can't you put me ashore?"

"In about an hour, old chap——"

Here the skipper called to his crew.

"Sam," he said, "take the wheel. I'll see if I can bring the poor devil to his senses."

He then went up to Foster and helped him into the cabin.

The young men stood back, feeling that the skipper could do more than they could.

"How did you happen to be in the water, mate?" asked the skipper, kindly. "Fall off'n one of them steamers?"

Foster put his hands to his aching head.

For a moment he was silent.

Then he said:

"I s'pose I'm acting like a loony, and perhaps I'm off my base, but, if you don't mind, I'd rather not tell my story to anybody, except Mr. Carter."

"Do you mean the famous detective?"

"Yes; I've heard that he's kind-hearted."

"So he is. Well, you go and see him, but first you must get into dry clothes. Dunno as I can fit you very well, but there's some old duds of mine and Sam's here that you're welcome to, if you'll put 'em on."

"Thank you, I will."

The skipper was hunting through a locker.

"Excuse the question," said he, as he pulled out some clothing, "but you don't look as if you was well heeled. Got much money with you?"

"Not a cent, but I will work to pay you——"

"Stow that, mate! stow that! I don't want any pay. I was only wonderin' how you'd get to Mr. Carter's."

"I can walk."

"But we shall land on Staten Island."

"Well, that's not many miles from the city, is it? I can walk, I tell you."

"On the water, mate? You didn't seem to be doin' much walkin' when we come across you."

The skipper smiled at his own humor.

Foster looked troubled.

"Aren't there any bridges?" he asked.

"Nary one. Only ferries."

"Well, I worked my passage from Jacksonville——"

"Oh! then you were aboard the *Moccasin*?"

"Yes."

"See here! you didn't go overboard on purpose, did you?"

"On purpose?" echoed Foster, astonished. "I should say not! What would I come as far as this for, if I wanted to give up?"

"Then some cuss pitched you over?"

Foster's brow darkened.

"Yes," he answered; "that's it."

The skipper drew a long breath.

"Well, by gosh!" he exclaimed, "if you want to tell Nick Carter about that, I'll see that you get to New York all right, all right."

He told Foster to change his clothes, and went out on deck.

"Young men," said he, "that chap ain't no loony. He's had his wits knocked on their beam ends, but he'll right in time. He wants to take his trouble to Nick Carter, and he hasn't got a cent. Says he worked his way up from Jacksonville, and he dreams of workin' his passage from Staten Island to the city."

He paused and the young men smiled.

"He hain't got a cent," continued the skipper. "Now, I says we must take a subscription to help him along. Gents, ante up liberal."

With this, the skipper took off his hat and passed it.

Coins fell into it freely, and, when Foster had got into dry clothes, the skipper took the money to him.

By that time the unfortunate man was a good deal better.

His head did not ache so badly, and his thoughts were clearer.

He almost cried when the skipper poured the coins on the cabin table.

"I ain't used to havin' people kind to me," he said. "The captain of the *Moccasin* was all right, and I haven't got anything against the crew, but the rest of the world has been mighty rough with me. I'll take this money, skipper, if you'll let me bring it back to you some day."

"Oh, that's all right. The boys chipped in."

Foster would not be satisfied, however, until he had written the skipper's name on a piece of paper.

"I'll come for my own clothes to-morrow," he said, "and, by and by, when I get regular work, I'll return the money."

"Say nothin' more about that," responded the skipper, gruffly, as he went back to the wheel.

An hour later the schooner came to anchor off Rosebank, and the passengers went ashore.

The young men, who belonged in New York City, kept Foster with them on the train and ferry, and did not part from him until they were at the Battery.

Then one of them looked up Nick Carter's address in a directory, and told Foster how to find the house.

"It's pretty late," he remarked; "better not bother the detective till morning."

"I shan't sleep," replied Foster, stubbornly, "until I've seen him."

And so it came about that there was a ring at Nick's bell almost at the moment when Sunday was going out, and Monday was coming in.

CHAPTER II.

FOSTER'S HARD LUCK.

It happened luckily for John Foster that Nick Carter was at home.

All others in the house were asleep, but the great detective was in his library, interested in a book.

He heard the bell, and went down himself to answer it.

A poorly-dressed stranger was on the step.

He started a bit when Nick pressed a button that suddenly threw his face into a glare of light.

"Does Mr. Carter live here?" the man asked, in a trembling voice.

"Which Carter, my friend?"

"Nicholas Carter, the detective."

"I am he."

Foster, for it was he, stared, speechless for a moment.

Then he caught Nick by the sleeve.

"For God's sake, sir," he said, hoarsely, "will you hear my story?"

Nick looked calmly at his visitor. He noticed the wild eyes, the man's excitement, and he half-suspected that the man was an escaped lunatic.

But the man's distress was evidently real, and, even if he were a lunatic, it would be wise to talk with him, and, meantime, send quietly to Bellevue for physicians to take charge of him.

So, "Come in," said the detective.

Foster followed him to the library, where he remained standing until Nick told him to sit down.

"Now," said the detective, in a friendly tone, "let's begin at the beginning. Tell me who you are, where you live, and how you got into trouble."

The man's lips trembled and his voice was very unsteady as he responded:

"There's one thing, Mr. Carter, that must be said before that."

"Well, what is it?"

"I can't pay you a cent. I'm a beggar! All I've got in the world is this."

Here he took a few silver coins from his pocket.

"And that," he added, was lent to me by some men who fished me out of the bay this evening."

"You needn't worry about paying me," said Nick, "but tell me why you came to me, if you haven't any money? Detectives usually get fees, you know."

"Yes. I do know, but I come to you because I hope you will be willing to do something so that other men may not be made the victims of the same rascally injustice that has made me a beggar."

Foster spoke with great earnestness, and the detective began to believe that he was not crazy.

"Very well," he said, quietly, "let me know all about it, and begin as I told you—name and residence first."

"My name is John Foster. I don't live anywhere now. My home used to be in Grafton, Massachusetts—a town near Worcester. I had a farm there.

"It wasn't the best farm in the world, Mr. Carter. No need to tell you that. That part of the country is covered with rocks, the soil isn't deep, and it takes a mighty lot of hard work to make a living from a farm there.

"All the same, I was knocking out a living, and bringing up my family in decent style.

"But I wanted to better myself. What man doesn't? I wanted to get some money ahead, and I found that impossible.

"To be sure, I had a little. The farm was free from debt, and I had two hundred dollars in the savings bank; but that was all there was to show for fifteen years of the hardest kind of work, and pinching and scraping, from one year's end to another.

"I wish to goodness I'd had the sense to stick to

what I had. It was little enough, but it was a good deal better than nothing."

Foster sighed bitterly.

"I suppose," suggested the detective, "that you were induced to invest in something that didn't turn out well."

"Yes, sir; that was it. That's the story, but, if it was only a case of putting money into a business that didn't pay, I wouldn't bother you to hear about it.

"I was swindled, Mr. Carter, awfully swindled, and, if something isn't done, other foolish farmers will be caught in the same trap."

He took some water-soaked papers from his pocket and handed them to Nick.

"I guess you can read them," he said. "They were in my clothes when I was thrown into the bay, and of course they got pretty wet, but I think you can make out what they say."

Nick glanced at the papers. Some were printed, others written.

"How did you get these?" he asked.

"The first came through the mail," replied Foster. "As you see, it is a letter asking me to look into some lands down in Florida. It simply says that there are good farming lands for sale there, and asks me to call at the office and find out about them."

"Did you call?"

"I did. The office was in Worcester, as you see from the letter head. I saw a man there whose name was Guy Preble. He told me a fine story about the lands, showed me a map, and gave me the second paper, which has in print all he told me."

Nick looked over the second paper. It was a description of Florida farm lands, telling how good the soil was, how oranges might be raised at great profit, and a lot of other statements that would be likely to interest a Northern farmer.

"The long and short of it is," said Foster, "that I decided to buy land in Florida. You'll see some letters there from Preble about price and so forth.

"He made me believe the chance was such a good one that I bought all the land I possibly could.

"I not only took my two hundred dollars from the bank, but I sold my farm and all the fixings."

"I paid Preble pretty nearly every dollar I had, keeping back only enough to pay for our travel to Florida, and a little more to begin on after we got there."

"Well," said Nick, "did you find that you had bought any land after you got there?"

"Oh, yes; I had bought land right enough, plenty of it, but it was under water, every foot of it."

"Indeed!"

"It was a swamp, sir. There wasn't a square rod of it that could be used for raising anything but alligators and snakes. You might think, perhaps, that there would be timber on it that could be cut down and sold."

"No, sir! There wasn't a stick of timber on the property that could be used even for firewood. It was all a tangle of creeping vines and worthless bushes and long grass growing out of the water."

"Couldn't it be drained?" asked Nick.

"I should say not! Why, sir, the bottom of that swamp was below sea level. It couldn't be made dry land in a million years."

"What did you do when you found you had been swindled?"

"I got my wife and children a place to stay with some poor people a few miles from my swamp, and then I went gunning for Preble."

"And you didn't find him."

"Yes, I did."

"But not in Florida."

"Yes, sir; in Florida."

"That's surprising. I wouldn't have supposed he would show himself down there."

"He did. He lives there. I found him at Palm Beach."

"Oh!"

Nick said this as if the words "Palm Beach" threw a good deal of light on the matter.

He was thinking of the fact that while Palm Beach is a resort for fashionable people, it is also a

headquarters for persons of shady reputation, on account of the heavy gambling that goes on there.

"What did he say to you?" asked the detective.

"He told me to go to the devil. Said I had bought the land, and that it was no longer any of his business."

"Are you sure that Preble had the right to sell that land?"

"Yes; I looked that up in the county clerk's office down there. He had a right to it, and I had bought it. That was all straight. The point is that he had been false in his descriptions——".

"Wait! these papers do not describe the land you bought. They merely speak of lands generally in Florida."

"I know, but——"

"He led you to believe that your land was of the same kind."

"Yes, sir, and there's where he swindled me."

"True, but there isn't a line in any of his letters that says what isn't so. You let yourself into the trap, you see."

"I know it," said Foster, bitterly, "but that doesn't make him any the less a cheat and a swindler, does it?"

"In one sense it doesn't, but in another it's different. He seems to have kept within the law."

Foster started up with a groan of despair.

"Then nothing can be done!" he cried.

"I'm not so sure about that," responded Nick. "Sit down again. Tell me more about your talk with Preble."

"There isn't much to tell. I said he'd swindled me and that I would expose him. He laughed at me, and said there would be nothing to expose except my own foolishness."

"Go on."

"I demanded that he give me my money back, and he laughed again.

"Then I told him that I'd go back North, if I had to walk, and put the matter in Nick Carter's hands."

"Ah! you mentioned my name, did you?"

"Yes. I had a fool idea it would scare him."

"Did it?"

"Yes, and no. In the first place, he sneered and asked how I would pay Carter the big fee he would demand. Then he wanted to know how my family would live while I was gone. My family! Curse him! He——"

Nick interrupted, for Foster was getting into a passion.

"Slow," said the detective, gently; "I'll hear all about it in time. Go on with what he said."

"He didn't say anything more except to order me out, and suggest that I'd better make the best of it and get work to do."

"Well?"

"An Indian servant of his opened the door for me and I went out. There was nothing else to do, though I felt like killing him, and if I had known what had happened I believe I should have done it."

"What had happened?"

Foster's eyes filled with tears, and his voice shook.

"It took me some days," he said, "to go to Palm Beach and back, for I had to hoof it most of the way."

"When I returned to the place where I left my family I found that my children had got swamp fever. One of them was dead and buried already. Two others died before I had been back a week."

The unhappy man bowed his head on his hands.

"I pity you deeply," said Nick.

"Thank you for that," moaned Foster. "At last there was only my wife and one little one left. My wife had a fearful attack of the fever, but we managed to get her out of it."

"By that time all my money was gone."

"I tried to get work. There wasn't much to be had, and the climate was against us. We were not used to it."

"At last I felt that the only way out of it was to get North somehow, where I might at least get work as a farmhand and save enough to send for my wife and child."

"So I got them a place to stay where my wife could do some work in part payment of her board, and I walked to Jacksonville."

Foster then told about his voyage, and the attack made upon him as the steamer was coming up the bay.

The detective was intensely interested.

"Was it Preble who attacked you?" he asked.

"No. I couldn't see the man, but I know it wasn't Preble's voice. I think it was a partner of his named Taylor."

"Oh! he has a partner, eh?"

"I think so. I saw a man with him whose name was Taylor, and it seemed to be his voice that spoke when I was struck."

"That's why I said 'yes and no' when you asked me if the mention of your name scared him. It seems to show that they watched me, and tried to prevent me from coming to you."

"That was it undoubtedly."

"And then there was another thing that I forgot."

"What was that?"

"After I had left Preble at Palm Beach I was attacked by his Indian servant."

"So!"

"It was in the evening. The redskin leaped at me with a knife from some bushes I was passing."

"Luckily I heard him and dodged in time."

"We had a struggle, and I downed him, but he wriggled away and disappeared."

"Are you sure it was Preble's servant?"

"Oh, yes; I saw him plainly."

"What was he called?"

"Penola."

Nick was silent for a minute or so, thinking.

His heart was hot as he thought of what Foster had suffered, but he saw that it would be a very difficult matter to bring Preble to justice.

It wasn't like a murder case, or theft, where a criminal was to be discovered and captured.

Preble had done wrong, but he had been clever enough to keep within the law.

"I don't believe he can be touched," thought Nick, "for the swindling that he has already done. I shall have to trap him in some new scheme."

Aloud he said:

"I will look into this matter, Mr. Foster. Meantime, I think it would be decidedly unsafe for you to leave this house."

"Why——" began Foster.

"Your enemy," interrupted the detective, "came to the city. He knew what you were coming for, and, although he may think that you are at the bottom of the bay, he won't take chances on that. If

he's as shrewd as I think he is, he will watch this house.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he saw you come in."

"Then what can I do? I want to go back to Staten Island in the morning to get my clothes, which will be dry by then, and return these. And I must get work as soon as possible."

"It won't do you any good to look for work and be murdered," replied Nick. "You stay here tonight, and don't leave the house until I tell you to. I'll see the skipper about your clothes. Don't worry about anything."

"You're very kind, Mr. Carter."

"No; I simply want to see if I can stop that villain from cheating any more men."

Nick then led Foster to a sleeping-room and left him.

"If that isn't an honest man then I'm greatly mistaken," he said to himself, "but I must be on the safe side. Fortunately, there's an easy way to find out."

CHAPTER III.

THE REDSKIN.

Early in the morning Nick went to the dock where the *Moccasin* lay.

He went aboard, asked for the captain, and, when he found him, said:

"I have called to ask about a man who says he came up from Jacksonville with you. His name is John Foster."

"Foster!" cried the captain. "I'd like to know about him myself. I've been hunting high and low for him."

"Then there was such a man on board?"

"Yes, he—"

"Thank you. That is really all I wished to know."

"But wait a minute, sir. This man Foster has disappeared, and I am very anxious about him."

"Why?"

"Because I took an interest in him. He came to me with the saddest hard luck story I ever heard. He wanted to tell the detective Nick Carter about it, and I meant to go with him to Carter. I'm not acquainted with the detective, but I understand he's a good sort of man, and I thought that if I was along he might perhaps pay some attention to Foster's story."

"Like enough," responded Nick, smiling, "but he paid some attention to it as it was. I am Carter."

"Good Lord!" cried the captain, holding out his hand. "I'm proud to meet you. But tell me about Foster. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, last night."

"Ah! then that accounts for it. He slipped ashore as soon as we got to the dock."

"No; you are mistaken. He was thrown into the bay by one of your passengers."

The captain was amazed.

"I suppose you know what you're talking about," he said, slowly, "and that may account for the way the cook missed him."

"How was that?"

The captain told how he had inquired at the cook's galley an hour before for Foster, and how the cook said nobody had seen him since some time last evening.

"They supposed he had struck work and joined the passengers," said the captain, "but I thought it strange that he should leave the ship without speaking to me."

"Did you have a passenger named Taylor?"

"I think not, but I'll see."

He sent for the purser, who brought a list of the cabin passengers.

The name Taylor did not appear on it.

"Take a pencil," said Nick, "and put a mark against the names of all the passengers with whom you are acquainted."

The captain did so. Not counting women and children, there were the names of eight men who, he said, were strangers to him.

Nick then asked the captain to tell him about each one of the men passengers whom he did know.

In this way the detective became satisfied that the would-be murderer was not one of those known to the captain.

"He was one of those eight," said Nick. "I must find out what became of each one of them."

He copied the names, and then went down to Staten Island, where he found the skipper who had rescued Foster.

From him the detective learned enough to show that Foster had spoken the truth in everything.

Nick explained that the rescued man could not come down for his clothes at that time, which the

skipper said wasn't necessary anyway, and then the detective went back home.

He gave the list of eight names to Patsy, and told him to trace them, first getting as good a description as Foster could give of Taylor, Preble's partner.

To Chick he said:

"You must keep this man under guard until you hear from me. It won't be safe for him to go out alone. I shall probably start for Florida to-night."

Patsy returned at the end of the afternoon.

With the list of names in his hand, he reported:

"Wilson went in a cab from the steamer to the Grand Central station and took a train for Buffalo.

"Johnson went to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and is there now. He's a rich man, who lives in Chicago,

"Mortimer is a New Yorker. He lives on West Seventy-second street, and he went home. To-day he has been at his business place.

"Richards, I'm not dead sure about him, but I think he started south on the midnight train from the Pennsylvania station."

"That's interesting," interrupted Nick. "A man travels up from the South by boat and starts back again before he's been four hours on land. How did you get onto it, Patsy?"

"I learned at the dock," replied the young detective, "that the baggage of one passenger was sent for in a hurry to be taken to the Pennsylvania station. I couldn't make certain which man it was, but it seemed to be Richards."

"Well?"

"Of course, I asked some questions at the railroad station. I described Taylor as Foster described him. Ticket-seller and baggage-man agreed that a man of that description took the midnight train. He bought a ticket for Jacksonville."

"Ah!"

Nick turned to Foster.

"Did you hear Taylor's full name?" he asked.

Foster thought a moment.

"I was going to say no," he answered, "but as I think of it I remember that Preble addressed him once as Dick."

"Dick," repeated Nick, thoughtfully. "That's the nickname for Richard, and Richard is almost Richards, isn't it? I guess it's a pretty safe thing, Mr. Foster, that your man is now on his way back to Florida."

"Then he must believe that he succeeded in killing me."

"Possibly, but he may be afraid of being captured. Perhaps he saw the schooner pick you up."

When Nick had heard the rest of Patsy's report he was more certain than ever that Foster's enemy had started back for the South on the same night that he arrived in New York.

He gave various instructions to his assistants, got all the information he could from Foster, and advised him to stay where he was until it was certain that he could go about without danger.

Then Nick started for Florida.

As he wished to lose no time, he went by rail.

He did not go straight to Palm Beach, but instead looked up Foster's wife and child before doing anything else.

Nick did not tell Mrs. Foster who he was, but he said that he was a friend of her husband's, and gave her some money, as if it came from him.

"I wouldn't say anything about this," he cautioned her, "for Preble might hear of it, and if he did he might give you trouble."

Mrs. Foster promised to keep quiet, and told Nick the way to the swamp that her husband had been induced to buy.

The detective took a short look at it.

"No wonder Foster was discouraged," he thought. "There are thousands of acres there that never can be of use to anybody."

His next call was at the county clerk's office, where he asked who owned the swamp lands.

"Well," replied the clerk, "most of that land stands in the name of Guy Preble, but I believe he's transferred a good part of it to a company."

"Ah! who is Preble?"

"We only know that he's a Northern capitalist."

"Indeed! then he hasn't owned the swamp very long?"

"Oh, no; not more than two years. He bought it for next to nothing, for it isn't worth anything. I understand that he thinks of draining it somehow."

"What about this company?"

"I don't know except what he has said. He says he has got a number of Northern people interested in it. Some of them have bought parts of the swamp."

"Are they satisfied with their purchases?" asked Nick.

The clerk hesitated.

"I don't know that I ought to say anything," he answered, "for it's none of my business, but the fact is that there have been a number of men here to complain that they've been swindled. But we can't do anything for them. I'm afraid there's been dishonest work, but, you see, Preble seems to be straight. He owned the land, and he sold it. What can we do about it?"

"Nothing. He hasn't sold it all, has he?"

"Oh, no! A good three-quarters of it is still in his possession."

That was all Nick wanted to know. He had no doubt that in time Preble would try to sell the rest of his worthless swamp to unsuspecting farmers, and he made up his mind to prevent him from doing so if possible.

Then he started for Palm Beach, but he stopped over night in St. Augustine on the way.

Late in the evening he left his hotel and went for a walk.

He had gone beyond the town and was on his way back when his attention was attracted by a sound of scuffling.

It was a lonely place. There were no houses near, and at a little distance was a forest.

At first the detective supposed that a couple of negroes were wrestling good-naturedly.

Then he heard angry words.

Running lightly forward, he came upon two men who had one another gripped by the wrists.

They were breathing hard, and each was trying to trip the other.

As Nick drew near one of them succeeded.

The other stumbled and fell, and as he went down he lost his grip.

Then in the darkness Nick saw an arm raised. There was a faint flash as a knife blade descended. "Stop!" shouted the detective, loudly.

He was too far away at that instant to leap upon the man who had the knife.

The unexpected sound of his voice did just what he hoped it would.

The man who was about to strike held back his arm and looked around.

The other man was quick to take advantage of the situation.

He scrambled up to begin the fight again.

At that the one with the knife turned upon him, and again aimed a blow.

But by that time Nick was on the spot.

He struck the upper man a stinging blow that sent him staggering along the road.

At the same instant the detective caught the man's knife hand, twisted the wrist and caused him, with a snarl of pain, to let go of the weapon.

It fell to the ground.

Then Nick found himself in trouble for a moment.

The other man had got to his feet and was coming at him.

He had some kind of a weapon raised.

"Steady, neighbor!" exclaimed the detective, grappling him so that he could not move.

It was well that he did so, for it proved that the man had a loaded revolver, and in another half-second he would have fired it straight in the detective's face.

"Let me alone, curse you!" grunted the man, trying to bring the muzzle of his weapon against Nick's breast.

Nick forced him to his knees, and then wrenched the revolver away from him.

"You don't seem to think very well of me for saving you from being stabbed to death," remarked Nick.

"What's that?" demanded the other, panting; "ain't you one of Preble's heelers?"

The mention of that name gave Nick a new interest in the affair.

But there was something else—

"Wait," said he; "listen!"

He was still holding the man on his knees.

Both were quiet for a moment.

They heard a sound of breaking twigs and hurried footfalls in the direction of the forest.

The sounds grew fainter and fainter.

"The infernal redskin's got away," muttered the man.

"Penola?" asked Nick.

"That's his name. You know him, do you?"

"I think I've heard of him."

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE GAMBLING TABLE.

Nick now let go of the man, and handed him his revolver.

"I guess you don't want to use that on me," he remarked.

"No," responded the man, wonderingly, "I don't. I understand now. At first I thought you was another of the rascally gang, but if it hadn't been for you that redskin would have made a hole in me, wouldn't he?"

"It looked that way."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you. What are you looking for?"

Nick was on his knees and feeling of the ground. "Penola's knife," he answered. "Here it is."

He struck a match to examine it.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the man, looking on, "I'd rather have a square meal inside of me than that thing."

It was a dagger of peculiar pattern.

The blade was about six inches long and two inches broad at the hilt.

It fitted into a case somewhat like that of a razor.

When Nick shut the blade into the case it flew back again.

"Huh!" he muttered; "that's odd."

"Fastens with a spring, likely," said the man.

"Yes."

Nick shut it again and found how to fasten it. He also saw that when the knife was closed it could be opened in a flash by pressing the spring.

"Nice plaything," he said. "I guess I'll keep it," and he put it in his pocket.

"Should think you would," responded the man. "I don't know how to thank you for helping me just now—"

"Don't try."

"I thought sure you was another of 'em. Who are you, anyway, mister?"

"Never mind who I am," replied Nick, "but tell me how you happened to have trouble with Penola."

"Why, I suppose I got into trouble with him because he does his master's dirty work."

"Do you refer to Guy Preble?"

"I do, curse him!"

"What has he done to you?"

"Done! he's robbed me of every dollar I ever had,

and he's done it in such a way that he's got the law on his side."

"Did you buy swamp land?"

"Yes, fool that I was! It's all under water to stay—but perhaps you got caught in the same deal, mister?"

"No, but I've heard about it. Did you buy in Worcester?"

"Yes. You seem to know all about it—"

"Where did you live?"

"In Spencer, a little way from Worcester."

"Did you bring your family to Florida?"

"No, because I haven't got any to bring."

"Then you're luckier than some."

"That's so. There was a man named Foster, for instance. He came down here with his wife and four children. Three of 'em died, and there wasn't a thing he could do for a living. He went North a while ago. I made up my mind I'd do the same, and I went to Preble to see if I couldn't raise the price of a ticket."

"You didn't get it, I suppose."

"No. We had a jawing match, and I started for the cabin of a friend of mine a few miles out to spend the night. Then I was attacked by that slippery redskin. You know the rest."

"All this shows," thought Nick, "that Preble is afraid of being exposed. He will murder any man who seems to have the nerve to get back North and show him up."

He asked aloud:

"Where did you see Preble?"

"In the city," replied the man.

"St. Augustine?"

"Yes," and he named the hotel at which Preble was staying. It was the same hotel at which Nick had put up.

The detective then asked the man his name.

"Joe Hawkins," was the reply.

"Well, Hawkins, if you'll take the advice of a stranger, you'll stay in Florida a little longer. Get something to do if you can and lie low. Keep out of Preble's way. This land swindle may be made straight some day."

"Are you going to expose Preble?" asked Hawkins, eagerly.

"I'd rather not talk about that," replied Nick. "Will you follow my advice?"

"Yes, I will. You've saved my life, and I'll do anything you say."

"Then stay here till you see me again or hear from me."

Nick took the man's address, and then went back to his hotel.

He inquired of the clerk if Guy Preble was in, and learned that the swindler had paid his bill and left an hour before.

The next day the detective went to Palm Beach.

As soon as he had engaged a room at a hotel, he went to the building where gambling was carried on.

There was a great crowd in the rooms, men and women both, and many tables were going.

The most popular game was roulette.

Nick wandered around the rooms for a time, looking the crowd over and pausing now and then beside a table where high play was in progress.

At last he found what he was looking for.

Foster had not been good at describing faces, so that Nick did not recognize Preble by sight; but as he stood watching a table he heard a man at his side say in a low voice:

"Play on the black, Guy. It has been red seven times in succession."

The man spoken to was seated with a considerable pile of chips in front of him.

The other was standing at his side, and was not playing.

"Preble and his partner, Taylor, I guess," thought Nick.

The man addressed as Guy put half his chips on the black the next time the wheel was turned.

Other persons placed their bets until the board was almost covered with chips or money.

For a moment there was a low, whirring sound as the marble spun around the rim of the wheel.

Then there was a rattling as it began to fall and struck against the guards of the slots one after another.

All heads were turned anxiously toward the wheel.

The marble fell into one slot, only to hop out again and drop into another.

It bounded out again and went jumping along until finally it dropped into a slot and stayed there.

The croupier, that is, the man who turned the wheel, looked at the slot and called:

"Thirty, even, third column, third dozen, red."

"You're a fine tipster, Dick," grumbled Guy, as the croupier raked in his chips.

"Well, it was time for black to win, anyway."

"Huh! perhaps you'll give me a number now that I'd better play flat-foot."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm a loser to-day," he responded. "Decide for yourself."

"Make your bets," called the croupier, as he prepared to spin the marble again.

Some of the players had won and some had lost. At this call money and chips rained on the board.

Preble, for Nick was now certain that it was he, hesitated a little, and then placed half of what he had left so that his bet "straddled" 23 and 26.

The marble began to whir.

Somebody reached over and laid a single chip on the zero.

Another pushed a twenty-dollar bill on the square marked "Even."

The marble began to jump.

"Nothing more goes," called the croupier.

Just at that instant Preble placed the rest of his chips on the square marked "Black."

The croupier saw him do this, but said nothing, and the bet, therefore, was accepted.

After the usual hopping about the marble fell into a slot.

The croupier's voice rose above the remarks of the players, who did not need to be told what had happened, for all could see where the marble landed.

"Fourteen, black, second dozen, middle column."

The chips that Preble had placed on the 23-26 were raked in, but the same amount was pushed up beside those he had placed on the black.

"Stand-off," he muttered.

He had lost one bet and won another.

"You ought to have put them all on the black," said Dick.

"Rats!" retorted Preble; "why didn't you tell me to put them on the fourteen?"

Dick turned about and walked away.

"Make your bets," called the croupier.

Evidently Preble meant to play longer.

As Nick wanted to study him and get acquainted, if possible, he decided to make a small play himself, for, if he stood there without playing, attention would be attracted to him and Preble's suspicions might be aroused.

Accordingly the detective put a silver dollar on the zero.

Preble put half his chips on the odd and kept the rest back.

"Nothing more goes," came the warning voice of the croupier, and a moment later there were a lot of "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" from those around the table.

The marble had stopped in zero.

Everybody had lost except Nick.

The croupier handed him thirty-five chips, valued at a dollar each, and play went on.

Naturally, everybody looked at the lucky man.

"Great luck to pick a winner the first time," remarked Preble.

"It probably won't happen again," laughed Nick. Preble did not bet on the next turn of the wheel.

The detective pocketed his silver dollar, and placed his chips in two bets.

He put ten against the row that contained the numbers 7-8-9, and the rest on the square marked "Even."

The other players scattered their bets as before.

"Nothing more goes," cried the croupier.

The marble whirred and rattled and stopped in the slot marked eight.

Nick had won both bets.

He was paid one hundred and twenty chips for the ten placed against the figures and twenty-five for those on the "Even."

Not a muscle of his face moved as he took in his winnings, which at that moment amounted to one hundred and eighty dollars.

Some of the other players had won on the turn, but, as usual, most of them had lost.

Now Nick had no wish to gamble.

He had already exchanged words with Preble, which was a step forward in his business, and his next wish was to get into private talk with the man.

"I'll lose all this as fast as I can," thought the detective. Then I can leave the table. If Preble doesn't follow me I can meet him later in the day, and there will be no difficulty in getting into conversation with him."

Accordingly when the croupier called, "Make your bets," Nick put one hundred and fifty dollars on the black, and the balance of his chips on the third dozen.

Preble watched him, and then placed all his own

chips, amounting to about fifty dollars, on the third dozen.

He was following the detective's play, but he followed wrong, for the marble stopped in the slot marked two.

Nick lost the bet he had placed on the third dozen, but won even money on the color.

Preble lost all he had in sight.

"I ought to have divided," he muttered, disconsolately.

Nick heard him.

"I'll make him lose if I can," he thought, as he saw Preble diving into his pocket for more money.

So, instead of dividing his chips at the next turn, Nick put them all, amounting to three hundred dollars, on the black.

That color had just come up.

It was probable, therefore, that red would come up next, and Nick wanted to lose.

If he lost that bet it would have cost him nothing to play, for he still had the silver dollar with which he began.

Preble took out a roll of big bills.

From them he selected a century, and reached out his hand as if he meant to follow the detective again.

Then he hesitated.

Evidently he reasoned that as black had just come up it would be red's turn next; and that it was not likely that any player would win four bets in succession.

So he changed his mind just at the last moment, and laid his hundred dollars on the red.

The marble fell into a slot.

"Fourteen," called the croupier, "second dozen, middle column, black wins."

"Ha!" exclaimed Preble, "you can't lose, can you?"

"Not if I don't play any more," replied Nick.

He pushed over the stacks of chips he had won, and called for cash.

Nick was afraid of attracting too much attention to himself.

He had not played very high as the game goes at Palm Beach, but he had won four times running, and that was enough to make people stare, especially as his silver dollar had brought in a comparatively large amount.

The croupier paid him six hundred dollars, and called:

"Make your bets."

Nick crammed the money carelessly into a vest pocket, and edged his way out of the crowd around the table.

There were more persons there than when he began to play, for news of his luck had traveled fast.

Men and women were coming up from other tables to watch the luck of the newcomer.

CHAPTER V.

A PRIVATE GAME.

Nick disappointed them.

He strolled slowly out, pausing near the entrance to get a light at the cigar-stand.

While he was there another man paused for the same purpose.

It was Preble.

"This is your lucky day," said he.

"It looks so," replied Nick, pleasantly.

"I should have thought you would press your luck. You might have broken the bank in a few minutes."

Nick shook his head.

"Good luck can't last forever," he said.

"True, but you could have afforded to lose a few bets. I believe you'd have come out a heavy winner."

"Time enough for that."

"You're going to stay a while, then?"

"A few days."

Both had their cigars lighted now, and they walked out together.

"Luck was against me to-day," remarked Preble. "In fact, I might have known after I played my first bet that I couldn't win."

"Why?"

"Because a certain old woman came up and began to play on the other side of the table."

Nick remembered that opposite him had stood an elderly woman, richly dressed, who bet a five-dollar gold piece at every turn, taking the coins from a bag that she carried.

When she won, she left the chips on the table and continued to bet with gold.

"Do you think she queered your game?" he asked.

"I know she did."

"Why?"

"Because it happens every time. I never win when she plays at the same table. This morning I saw her at one table and I took pains to get a seat at another, but no sooner had I begun than she waddled around to my table and began her infernal picking."

Nick did not laugh. He knew that regular gamblers are often superstitious in just that way.

"Has she got anything against you?" he asked, seriously.

"Not that I know of," replied Preble, with equal seriousness. "I'm not acquainted with her, though, of course, I know all about her."

"I suppose she's a regular, then?"

"You bet she is! You wouldn't ask if you'd been here long."

"I've just arrived, and never was here before."

"Well, you'll meet some queer people. Countess Telka is one of them."

"Is that the old lady you refer to?"

"Yes. She has spent her whole life at the roulette table. In Baden Baden she went through a fortune. Then she got hold of some more money, and went to Monte Carlo. There she played in luck, and after several years became very rich."

"And she didn't stop?"

"Not she. She heard of Palm Beach, and so she came over here early in the winter to try it. She's been playing steadily ever since."

"Has she won?"

"Yes. How much I don't know, but she never loses much. She takes just so much money with her in gold pieces to the table. If she loses them she stops for the day. If she strikes a winning streak she presses her luck and hauls off a good pile."

"Funny you can't win when she's playing."

"I know it is, but I can't. She's my hoodoo."

"Well," said Nick, "you quit the game, and so did I, and for pretty much the same reason."

"Why! did you see a hoodoo at the table, too?"

"No one person. It was the crowd."

"Ah!"

"I don't like a crowd around when I'm playing."

"I see. You like a nice quiet game between gentlemen, without any strangers looking on."

"That's my style."

Nick, of course, had his reasons for talking in this way.

In the first place, he wanted to convince Preble that he was not a professional gambler.

In the second he hoped to draw the fellow out, and so get on close terms with him.

The detective succeeded.

Preble smoked a moment in silence, and then said:

"The fact is, I like a quiet game better myself. If you feel like going into one I think I can accommodate you."

"I don't mind," Nick responded; "what's your game?"

"Well, anything, of course, but what do you say to faro?"

"Is there a faro bank running here?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't mean the regular banks. I mean a game between ourselves."

"Ah! Got an outfit?"

"Yes. It's in my room."

"Well, I don't know but I'll play a stack or two against you. When shall it be?"

"Now, if you like."

"All right."

They had been sitting on a hotel piazza.

At this they both arose, but Preble hesitated.

"Do you object to one other man in the game?" he asked.

"Not if he's all right," Nick replied.

"Oh, sure! you see, there's a gentleman here who feels just as you do. He hates to play in a crowd. We were speaking of a quiet deal at faro last evening, and he said that if there was one other man to go in he'd like to play."

"Well, hunt him up, and tell him you've found the other man."

"I will. If you'll wait here a few minutes I think I can find him."

"Go ahead."

Nick sat down again, and Preble hurried away.

There was a quiet smile on the detective's face as he waited.

He knew pretty well who the other man would be, and he knew that the "quiet game" would be played in such a way as to make it impossible for anybody but Preble to win.

"He thinks he's caught a sucker," chuckled Nick,

"and that between him and his partner there'll be a good rake off."

In less than a minute Preble returned, bringing with him the man who had stood at his side when Nick went up to the roulette table.

"I didn't get your name," said Preble.

"Whittaker," responded Nick.

"Ah! my name is Preble, Mr. Whittaker, and this is Mr. Taylor, the gentleman I told you about."

Nick and Taylor shook hands.

The detective had thought of it before, but he was struck again by the fact that these swindlers used their right names.

"They feel pretty safe," he reflected, "for they have worked their game so that the law seems to be on their side."

"If you're ready," Preble began.

"Lead on," said Nick.

They went to a room in the hotel where Preble opened a trunk and brought out a roll of oilcloth.

He unrolled this, and laid it on a table.

On it were painted the cards and other marks of a faro layout.

Preble also produced a deal box and several packs of cards.

He asked Nick to select a pack, and the detective did so.

"I suppose I'm to be the bank," said Preble.

"Yes," responded Nick. "Any limit?"

The question seemed to startle the swindler a little.

Apparently he had caught a bigger sucker than he had thought.

"Well," he said, "if that's your game, Mr. Whittaker, I'll have to stand it."

"All right," remarked Nick, coolly, "no limit."

"Hold on, though!" exclaimed Preble. "I don't know that I do want to go quite so far. Suppose we say five thousand dollars. That's high enough, isn't it?"

"I'm satisfied."

"Suits me," added Taylor.

So the game began.

Nick always went supplied with plenty of money, but, unless he was going on a very long journey, he never took more than five thousand dollars in cash at a time; and that amount, with his morning's winnings, was just about what he had with him then.

"You'll show that you're good for it, I suppose?" he suggested, quietly, before the deal.

"Certainly," replied Preble, and he flashed a big wad of bills, saying:

"Will you count them?"

"No," answered Nick, "not until I win them," and he laughed good-humoredly.

Preble smiled, but it was plain that he was uneasy.

His hands trembled at first as he shuffled the cards, but by the time he had put them in the box he was perfectly cool.

"It looks to me," thought Nick, "as if Preble was getting down to rock bottom. He needs money, and he's bound to get away with mine. That makes him excited. Well, we'll see if he can play a crooked game without making a slip."

Nick bought a stack of twenty chips at one hundred dollars each.

Taylor did the same.

The detective began by placing all his chips on the table in four bets of five hundred dollars each.

The room was very still.

Both Taylor and Preble seemed to be holding their breath.

"Do you want to bet on the first turn?" asked Preble, addressing Taylor.

Taylor's response was to put one chip on the high card.

Preble pushed two cards out of the box.

A king came first, a four spot second.

Taylor lost.

None of Nick's bets was decided by the turn.

One of his bets was on the jack.

Taylor continued to bet on the high card, increasing his stake a chip every time he lost.

He kept about even.

At the fifth turn a jack showed second.

Nick had won, and Preble pushed five chips beside those already on that card.

Nick let them stay there, thus doubling his bet.

On the very next turn a jack showed first, but a ten spot was second, and, as Nick had a bet on that card, he lost one and won the other, thus coming out where he started.

So it went through the deal, and at the end Nick was five hundred dollars ahead and Taylor five hundred out.

Preble, therefore, had neither lost nor won.

"I'm on now," thought the detective, while the cards were being shuffled. "Taylor will lose steadily. That will be for the purpose of blinding me. I will be allowed to win for a while, and then they'll soak me."

The second deal seemed to show that Nick was right.

He had won three thousand dollars, and Taylor had lost what he started with.

The latter bought another thousand dollars of chips.

Before beginning the third deal Preble struck a bell.

In answer to it a young Indian came in.

"Let's have whisky, Penola," said Preble.

The Indian brought a bottle, and poured a glass for each man.

"Here's how," said Preble, draining his glass at a single gulp.

"How," responded Taylor, doing likewise.

The detective nodded, raised his glass to his lips, pretending to take a swallow, and set it down.

As a fact not a drop touched the detective's tongue.

He suspected that the Indian had drugged the liquor, and he wouldn't take chances.

But he smacked his lips and remarked:

"Good liquor, gentlemen."

"Yes," said Preble, "twenty years old. Drink hearty."

"I like a little at a time," said Nick, and he placed a big bet on the table.

The Indian stayed in the room, watching the game from a little distance.

It was plain to Nick's keen eyes that Preble meant to do him up on this deal.

Probably he had hoped that the liquor would stupefy his victim and make the work easier.

When it got to the last turn, Taylor had lost all his chips and had stopped playing.

"The game is too steep for me," he said, with a laugh.

Nick was down to the two thousand with which he had started.

He took the rest of his money out of his pocket, counted out three thousand dollars, and placed the bills underneath his chips on the king.

Then he put a one-cent piece on top of the stack.

"I bet the limit," he remarked, quietly, "that the

king loses," which meant that he bet that the first card to show from the box would be a king.

He saw Preble draw a deep, silent breath, and press his lips hard together.

"That goes," he said, huskily.

He put his right hand on the deal-box and began to draw off the top card.

On the instant Nick's arm shot out.

He did not hit the swindler.

Instead he raised his arm and brought it down swiftly, and as it descended there was the flash of a dagger below his hand.

The sharp-pointed blade was driven through the cuff of Preble's coat sleeve, and into the table.

The steel grazed the swindler's wrist, but did not draw blood.

As a result of the strange blow, Preble's hand was pinned to the place where it lay.

He could not draw it away without tearing his coat sleeve, and for an instant he was too astonished to do so.

That instant was enough for the detective.

He pulled up the fingers that held the card just being pushed from the box.

Instead of a single card, two dropped to the table. The one that should have come first was a king.

In the next instant, the detective yanked the knife from the table, pushed back Preble's sleeve, and showed a card there that the swindler had meant to substitute for the king.

That would have made it appear that the king came second, and thus Nick's five thousand dollar-bet would have been lost.

It takes a great deal longer to tell about this than it did to do it.

All was done as in one flash.

"My knife!" gasped the Indian.

It was Penola's dagger that Nick had used to expose Preble's trick.

Both Taylor and Preble were too startled in that first instant to stir.

Then, as Nick drew back, Taylor leaped to his feet and his hand reached for his hip-pocket.

Before either of them could draw a weapon the detective's revolver was moving swiftly but steadily from one to the other.

"It won't do, gentlemen and redskin," said he, coolly; "I've got the drop on all of you, and, by the Almighty! I'll shoot if you give me any cause to do so."

They saw business in his stern eyes, and every one of them stood still.

Preble muttered a hoarse oath.

"You do business quick," he said.

"It's a way they have where I came from," replied Nick. "We won't waste any more time about the rest of it, either. Ante up five thousand to meet my bet."

"I only meant to play a joke——"

"Ante up and shut up!"

Preble pressed his lips together, and slowly took five thousand dollars from the pile in front of him and placed the money beside Nick's bet.

"Now cash in my chips," demanded the detective.

The swindler glanced at Taylor.

The latter was deathly pale, and his eyes were fixed in Nick's direction.

But he was not looking at the detective.

He was seeing something just beyond.

Nick perceived this, and, quickly slipping his revolver into his left hand and holding it so that Preble and Taylor were covered by it, he swept his right hand suddenly around behind him.

His doubled fist caught Penola with terrific force on the jaw.

The Indian, who had been a little behind the detective, had been creeping stealthily up, meaning to strike Nick down.

With a howl of surprise and pain, he stumbled across the room and brought up against the wall.

The detective did not even glance at him.

"I told you it wouldn't do," he remarked. "You men know that if I should tell of this——"

"For Heaven's sake don't expose us!" exclaimed Preble; "I'll square up."

"I was going to say," continued Nick, quietly but sternly, "that if I should speak of this, you two would be run out of Palm Beach and you'd never be allowed to play here again. But I don't want any more trouble with you. I give you till to-morrow morning to get out. If you're here then I'll expose you. Ante up, now!"

CHAPTER VI.

COUNTESS TELKA.

Preble was pushing his chair back from the table, and his hand, too, was reaching for a pocket.

Preble counted out the required money, and Nick tucked it in his pockets.

Then he backed to the door, keeping his revolver up all the time, and went out.

"Now," he thought, as he went down the hallway, "that rascally pair will have to get out. They're almost broke, and they'll have to raise money somehow. Whatever their game is, I'll spot them and check them."

It will be understood that Nick did not want to expose the swindlers at Palm Beach.

That would not prevent them from cheating poor farmers again.

It was necessary to catch them in some crime, and, now that they had little money left, the detective was sure that they would return to swindling.

He went to his room and wrote a letter to Chick.

"Foster paid Preble four thousand dollars for his swamp lands," he wrote, "and he lost more than that in travel and other misfortunes. I have just collected five thousand dollars from Preble at his private faro bank, and this morning I touched the wheel for six hundred dollars more. Those two sums together will just about make Foster even. So I want you to go to Worcester with him, buy back his old farm, or get him a new one, and set him up as well as you can. It will be a good plan to buy a farm for about four thousand dollars, and give the balance to Foster to make a start with."

When he had written his letter, Nick disguised himself thoroughly and went back to the gambling hall.

There was a great crowd there, and it was thickest around the table where he had played in the morning?

Countess Telka was still there, and it seemed that she was having a run of luck.

She was no longer betting a single gold piece at a time, but she was laying them down by the handful.

In front of her was a great pile of chips and money.

That was what she had won so far.

At almost every turn she added to the pile.

She scattered her bets all over the board so that some of them were lost each time, but her winnings generally went far ahead of her losses.

Among those who were looking on were Preble and Taylor.

Both were scowling and silent.

Nick took his place directly behind them.

After a few turns Preble's hand went to his pocket, and he drew forth a bill.

"Don't!" whispered Taylor; "what's the use? this isn't a lucky day for us."

"Right," growled Preble, putting the money away. "Hang that man Whittaker!" he added, fiercely. "I never dreamed he was a professional gambler."

"That's what he is, all right," said Taylor. "He beat us out neatly."

"I should say so! we haven't got a thousand left between us."

"I know it. We've got to do something."

"Well?"

"What's the matter with getting more fleece?" Preble did not answer for a moment.

The detective understood what fleece meant.

Taylor was suggesting that they sell more worthless swamp land to Northern farmers.

"I suppose we shall have to," grumbled Preble, after a moment, "but it takes so long to raise anything that way."

"Not more than a month or six weeks, and it's dead sure."

"That's so."

"And we've got just about capital enough to make the play with."

"To say nothing of Whittaker's threat to drive us from the beach."

"I wonder if he meant it?"

"Undoubtedly. I never saw a man who meant business as much as he did."

There was another moment of silence, for attention was again attracted by Countess Telka.

The old woman had begun to play the limit.

"Pressing her luck with a vengeance!" muttered Preble beneath his breath.

Countess Telka's play was so interesting that almost everybody else at the table stopped betting.

"Make your bets," called the croupier, and the countess was the only one who put down anything.

For three turns of the wheel she lost all she put down.

Then she bet the limit in several different ways on one number, the twenty-three.

For one thing, she played the number flat for one limit; then she put the limit on the column in which the number appeared; and she bet the limit also on the odd and the color.

It took all the gold coin she had in her bag, but she did not touch any of the money or chips that she had won.

"That means," whispered Preble, excitedly, "that she'll stop on this play whether she wins or loses."

"Make your bets," called the croupier.

Nobody stirred.

The marble was set whirring.

It began to jump.

"Nothing more goes," said the croupier.

Somebody coughed.

"Keep still!" exclaimed a man, angrily.

He and the rest were so excited that the least noise rattled them.

Down went the marble at last.

There was a chorus of long breaths from the crowd.

The croupier called:

"Twenty-three, red, second dozen, middle column."

Countess Telka had won every bet!

She folded her hands and waited.

Not a muscle of her face moved.

The croupier counted her coins and made a calculation, figuring the winnings with a pencil and paper.

"Thirty-five thousand and five hundred dollars," said he, with a glance at the old woman.

"Right," said she.

She had calculated the amount in her head.

The croupier turned to the rack of chips and the money drawer.

He counted out several thousand dollars in chips and several thousand more in cash.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and touched a bell.

A half-whispered cry went up from the crowd:

"She has broken the bank!"

It was indeed so, but Countess Telka never moved.

She stood with folded hands until a messenger was sent to the office of the company that ran the gambling-hall.

It took but a few minutes.

When the messenger returned, he brought enough cash to settle with her.

She stowed it in her bag, and moved slowly away, while the croupier stacked up the chips that had been in use.

The game was at an end at that table for the day.

For it is a rule of the place that when the bank has been broken there shall be no more play at the unlucky table until the next day.

Nick watched the scene with the greatest interest.

He had witnessed heavy gambling before, but nothing quite as striking as this richly-dressed old woman, who played and won as if the result meant nothing to her.

"She's as cold-blooded as they make them," thought Nick.

But he was equally interested in Preble and Taylor, over whom he kept the sharpest watch.

The swindlers stood at the table until Countess Telka had been paid.

As she started away Nick saw Taylor clutch Preble suddenly by the sleeve and whisper to him.

Preble started and his eyes rested a second upon the old woman and her money-bag.

Then he lowered his head, and both swindlers walked rapidly away.

"Ah!" said Nick to himself, "there's more than one way to raise the wind: It may not be necessary to go North for fleece, eh? So that's it! Well, well; we'll see."

And with this thought, he, too, left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

PENOLA'S DIRTY WORK.

It was now evening. Most of those who had been in the gambling-hall all day went to the various hotels for dinner.

Nick found the hotel where Countess Telka stayed and then had a private conversation with the proprietor.

Having given his card to the landlord, he said:

"I have reason to believe that one of your guests will be robbed to-night, and I would like to be allowed to prevent it."

"Well!" exclaimed the landlord, "I should be very glad if you would. Who is the intended victim?"

"Countess Telka."

"Indeed! I hear she broke the bank."

"Yes, and she keeps her money with her, doesn't she?"

"Every dollar. I have advised her to put it in our safe, but she won't listen to me."

"Does anybody occupy the room next to hers?"

"I'll see."

The landlord looked up his books, and reported that one of the rooms next that of the countess was empty.

"Then I'll take it," said Nick. "Is there a door between the two rooms?"

"No."

"I hope you won't object if I make one."

"No," said the landlord, doubtfully, "but wouldn't it be just as well if you should warn the countess?"

"Not quite. I have special reason for wishing to catch the robbers in the act. And whatever happens I don't want it whispered that I have been here."

"All right, Mr. Carter; do as you please."

Nick obtained some carpenter's tools, and had them taken secretly to the room next that of the countess.

While she was at dinner he cut an opening through the wooden partition between his room and the clothes closet of hers.

This did not take long, for all he had to do was to remove a board, thus leaving a hole large enough for him to squeeze through, and when the task was finished he replaced the board so that it would look from inside the closet as if nothing had happened.

Then Nick went to the dining-room.

Countess Telka was there, but neither Preble nor Taylor was in sight.

The detective kept his eyes on the countess all through the evening, fearing that an attempt might be made to steal her money-bag before she went to bed.

Nothing of that sort happened, and not once did he see either of the swindlers.

It was not until after midnight that the gambling-hall was closed, and the hotel became quiet; and it was not till then that Countess Telka went to her room.

At that time the detective took his place in his own room, and waited, listening.

After an hour had passed he softly removed the board that he had cut away and got into the closet.

The door opening into Countess Telka's chamber was closed and he opened it a crack.

Her room was on the back side of the hotel, and one story from the ground.

There was a lawn on that side about a hundred yards across.

It ended at a grove.

Looking through the partly opened door, Nick saw that the countess had left her window wide open.

Her heavy breathing assured him that she was sound asleep.

Another long hour passed.

The detective kept his eyes fixed upon the window.

It was almost perfectly dark in the chamber, and it was but little lighter outside.

At last, without any sound whatever, he saw a dark spot appear on the space just above the window-sill.

It was a man's head.

The detective could distinguish nothing more than the outline, but he could see that the man had no hat on.

"One of them," he thought, "is on the other's shoulders. I hope it's Preble who is going to climb into the room."

If that should prove to be the case, Nick's work would be finished quickly and easily.

Preble would be caught in the act of robbery. That would mean a long term in prison.

And that would stop the swindling operations, for it was very clear that Preble was the leader, and that Taylor could not do much, if anything, without him.

For a full minute the head stayed where it was, perfectly motionless.

Then it rose slowly, the shoulders came into view, and hands were laid on the window-sill.

The countess slept on, and there was no reason why she should not, for the robber made no noise.

Little by little he came higher, until he bent far over and placed his hands on the floor.

He lay across the window-sill for a moment without moving, and during that time the detective heard a faint sound from outside.

Somebody seemed to be creeping away.

It was a very slight noise, but it was enough to show that the man or men who had helped the robber up to the window were going away.

He was to do his work unaided.

Presently the robber began to squirm across the window-sill.

He worked very slowly, trying evidently to make no noise.

At last he was entirely in the room, and he re-

mained on his hands and knees for several seconds without stirring further.

Nick pushed the closet door a little further open.

He could not see the robber now, for the man was below the level of the window-sill, and therefore in deep shadow.

But, softly as a cat, the robber was creeping across the room.

There was at length a faint rustling from the direction of the bed, and Nick knew that the robber was beginning to pull the bag of money from under the pillow.

"Skillful work!" thought the detective.

He noticed that the countess breathed as steadily as before, thus showing that she was not disturbed.

It was important as evidence to catch the robber with the money actually in his hands.

So the detective waited until the rustling ceased.

The robber was going back to the window.

He moved softly still, but not so softly as before.

His success had made him confident, and now he was hurrying.

Nevertheless, he made almost no noise, but there was enough for the detective to hear.

At that moment, therefore, Nick threw open the closet door and with one leap came upon the man in the darkness.

The detective himself made as little noise as possible, and the man he attacked did not utter a cry.

For less than a second there was a struggle.

The money-bag dropped to the floor, wrenched from the robber's hand by the detective.

Then a strange thing happened.

The detective picked the man up, carried him in two strides to the window, and threw him out.

Thud! went the man's body on the turf, and by that time Nick was back in the closet and squeezing through the opening he had made into his own room.

And by that time the Countess Telka was awake and screaming like mad.

She scrambled from bed and pushed a button on the wall to alarm the night clerk.

"Thieves!" she was crying, "robbers! my money! my money!"

As Nick was hurriedly replacing the board he had cut from the partition, he saw a ray of light.

The countess had turned on the light in her room.

Then he heard her choking and sobbing with relief.

She had found her money-bag on the floor.

"Safe! safe!" she stammered over and over.

There were hurried footsteps in the hall, and a knock at the door of the countess.

"What is the trouble?" asked a voice.

"There's been a robber in my room," replied the countess. "Wait a moment."

She hurriedly threw on a wrapper, and let the clerk in.

Nick was changing his disguise.

That was quickly done, and while the clerk was talking with the countess, the detective walked quietly down to the office.

A number of persons had been aroused by the screams.

Some of them were going through the hall, others came down to the office to find what was the matter.

Among them was the landlord.

He came in, looking all around, inquiringly.

Nick went up to him and spoke in a low tone.

"I'm the man you're looking for."

The landlord stared.

"I don't know you," he responded.

"I am Carter. Let's go into your private room."

The landlord could hardly believe his ears, but he led the way, and soon they were where they could talk freely.

Nick removed a part of his disguise to show who he was, and then said:

"The robbery has been prevented."

"But did you catch the robber?"

"I didn't try to."

"Didn't try!"

"No. The man who entered the room to steal the money was not the man I wanted to catch. The real robber had another man to do his dirty work for him. So I let him go."

"But was that right, Mr. Carter?"

"You may be very sure it was. The men who planned this robbery won't be seen here again very soon, and if I succeed with the rest of my plan they'll never turn up again. I have driven them away, and, as I know pretty well where they'll go, I shall follow them up and catch them in crime."

"But what shall I say——"

"Why! let it be understood, if you like, that the robber got into the room through a hole in the partition."

"The one you made?"

"Certainly. The Countess Telka will find it. Meantime, I have disappeared, for nobody will know me in this disguise, and by the first train that leaves this morning I shall start for New York."

"Well, I suppose you know best. Ah! there's the countess in the office. I must see what she wants."

The countess wanted to put her money in the safe.

She told excitedly about finding that a hole had been cut through the partition, and Nick stood by listening.

He was satisfied that everybody would think the robbery had been attempted by the man in the next room; that would make it sure that Preble and Taylor could get away.

"It's important that they should escape," said Nick to himself, "for I must catch them in crime. It won't do any good to capture Penola, for he wouldn't confess that they told him to do the stealing. And if they read in the papers that a man in the hotel is suspected, they'll think they're safe."

Nick had done this reasoning on the instant when he attacked the robber in the Countess Telka's room.

Putting his hand to the man's face he had felt that it was neither Preble nor Taylor.

He felt the Indian's high cheek bones, felt his coarse hair, and knew that he had hold of Penola.

So, planning his action like a flash, he had thrown the Indian out of the window and proceeded in the way described:

CHAPTER VIII.

PREBLE'S FATAL CURIOSITY.

Two days later Nick was in New York. There he was met by Patsy, to whom he had telegraphed.

Patsy told him that Chick was in Worcester, helping Foster get started on a new farm.

Nick telegraphed Chick to stay in Worcester till he arrived, and then went on to that city.

The morning after he reached there the papers had an advertisement about Florida farm lands.

The advertisement read almost exactly like the circular that Foster had received from Preble.

Easy terms were offered to farmers, and they were invited to call at a certain office on Main street to see maps and learn particulars.

The name signed to this advertisement was Theodore Wellman.

At an early hour that morning, a desk and some chairs were put into the office mentioned in the advertisement, and a sign painter called and put the words, "Florida Land," on the door.

All this was done before ten o'clock, at which time Mr. Wellman came in, and was ready for business. Nobody called on him till after noon.

Then a farmer arrived who said he'd seen what was said in the paper and guessed he'd look into the thing.

"I am sorry," responded Mr. Wellman, "that I can't give you any more information just now. You see, I've only begun business to-day and my maps have been delayed somewhere on the railroad. Call again next week."

The farmer said he would do so, and went away.

Three or four others called and got the same sort of answer to their questions.

A little after three o'clock, however, a man came in with whom Mr. Wellman was more willing to talk.

"I understand," said the caller, "that you are dealing in Florida lands."

"Yes," replied Mr. Wellman.

"Where are they?"

"In Florida."

The caller smiled.

"Of course," he said; "I didn't suppose they were in Texas. What part of the State?"

"My maps haven't arrived, or I would show you. Can't you come in again to-morrow?"

"Perhaps, but I say, Mr. Wellman, I think you've kind of got into my field."

"So?"

"Yes; I deal in Florida land, too."

"You don't say!"

"And the queer thing is that I make just about the same announcement that you do."

Mr. Wellman looked at his caller a moment, and said, slyly:

"Perhaps that is because we deal in the same kind of land."

The caller winked.

"Can you raise a good crop of alligators on yours?" he asked.

"Fine!" said Wellman.

"Then I guess we are in the same line, and what I think, Mr. Wellman, is that there isn't room for two of us in Worcester."

"So?"

"Sure! Now, I was here first——"

"But I've come to stay."

"Well, then, we ought to arrange a deal between ourselves so that one can help the other."

"That might do."

"You see," and the caller lowered his voice, "we could get the farmers between us and squeeze them. We can make it appear that there's a big boom in Florida land, and so get higher prices. What do you think?"

"It's worth thinking of. I shall want to know exactly how you would manage it."

"Of course! I saw your advertisement, and was very curious about it. I thought I was onto your game, but I didn't think of our working together until just now. Let's talk it over to-morrow, will you?"

"With pleasure."

"Then come to my hotel and lunch with me. I'll have a plan ready to discuss."

"All right," said Mr. Wellman; "I'll be there. What hotel?"

"Bay State; one o'clock."

The men said "good-day" and parted, after which Mr. Wellman closed his office for the day.

He went to the Waldo House and entered a room where Chick was reading.

"Well, Nick," said Chick, looking up, "have you hooked him?"

"Yes," replied Nick Carter, *alias* Wellman; "he has bitten, and wants me to become his partner."

He then told Chick about the meeting with Preble, for that was "Mr. Wellman's" last caller, and about the lunch at which they were to talk over matters on the next day.

"Preble," said Nick, "will speak freely about his swindling schemes, and that will be evidence enough to send him up for a long term. But you must manage to hear what he says, Chick, as it will be safer to have more than my testimony against him."

"All right, old man, I'll be on hand."

Next day at one, Nick went into the Bay State House office, and was met by Preble, who said:

"I've ordered lunch in my room, so that we can talk more freely than if we were at the dining-room table."

They went up to a room on the north side of the third floor, where a table was spread and waiting for them.

Preble told the waiter that they would get along without him, and the man went out.

He then sat down and asked Nick to do so.

The detective took a seat opposite Preble.

At his right in front of him was a window, Preble's back being to it.

Behind the detective at a distance of about a dozen feet was a wardrobe, or closet.

This was not a closet made into the wall, but more like a big box with doors.

The doors were closed when Nick entered, but he had hardly taken his seat when they began to slowly open.

"Help yourself, Mr. Wellman," said Preble. "We can talk after we've eaten a bit."

The wardrobe doors opened a little further.

Nick filled his plate.

"I suppose," he remarked, "that you've already sold some of your land?"

"Yes, some."

"Do you throw in boats and rafts when you sell?"

Nick laughed as he spoke, and winked at Preble.

A dark, hateful face appeared between the wardrobe doors.

It looked fiercely at the detective.

Then the eyes were turned for an instant at Preble. The latter moved his chair a little to one side.

"Not quite," he said, in answer to Nick, and he grinned.

"A raft," added the detective, "might be handy for the farmer when he went out to plant potatoes."

"Or pick oranges."

Both men laughed.

Preble took a mouthful of food.

"Don't wait, Mr. Wellman," he said; "things will get cold. We can talk afterward."

The man in the wardrobe raised his hands.

They held a bow and arrow.

Very carefully he aimed the arrow.

It was pointed toward the back of Nick's neck.

Preble's servant, the Indian Penola, held the weapon, and the Indian knew what would happen if the tip of the arrow head should scratch his victim's skin.

Poison of the deadliest kind was on the arrow tip.

One drop of it mingling with a man's blood would kill him instantly.

Nick took a swallow of water and reached for a piece of bread.

Preble coughed.

At that the Indian's right hand let go the bow string.

The poisoned arrow flew straight toward Nick's head.

And at that instant a pane of glass in the window was broken.

Only a little hole was made in it—just big enough for a pistol bullet.

The bullet flew faster than the arrow, and struck it in mid air.

The arrow snapped in two pieces.

The head with its poisoned tip was turned from its course and struck the wall.

The other end dropped to the floor.

As the cough was the signal for Penola to shoot, so the pistol shot was a signal for Nick.

He didn't know that it was coming, but when it came, he acted without delay.

Jumping up, he pushed the table over against Preble.

Dishes and things fell to the floor with a crash.

Preble was almost tipped over, and before he could get his balance Nick was upon him.

There was a short struggle, and then the swindler lay on the floor, cursing, his hands held fast with bracelets.

Meantime, there was another crash.

This time it was Chick dashing straight through the window.

He had taken the next room to Preble and got out on the window sill, from which he stepped to the sill of the window to Preble's room.

There he meant to stand in order to overhear the conversation between the swindler and Nick.

From where he stood he could see the wardrobe.

He saw the doors open and the arrow aimed.

At just the right moment he fired, and so saved Nick from death.

Immediately afterward, Chick sprang into the room.

Penola was already trying to escape from the door, but Chick caught him and threw him with fearful force to the floor.

Handcuffs were put on while he lay there half-stunned.

"Curse you!" muttered Preble, "you are Nick Carter, aren't you?"

"I am," Nick replied; "when did you find it out?"

"Not till now."

"You really thought I was a land swindler, did you?"

"I may as well admit it, now that the game's up," replied Preble. "I thought you'd got into the kind of game I was working and that it would be safer if there was only me in it. Penola was sure he could fix you so that the doctors would think you died of heart disease."

"Well," replied Nick, "I expected to trap you into statements that would do to send you up for a few years, but this is better. I shall charge you with attempted murder, and that will be a life sentence for both of you."

It came out that way. Both Preble and the Indian were put in prison for life.

Taylor could not be found at that time, but Nick did not worry about him, as Preble was the important man. It happened, though, that the detective ran across Taylor at another time, the circumstances of which will be told in another number of this weekly.

Nearly a thousand dollars in cash were found upon Preble. The court decided that this money could not belong to him, and it was used to bring Hawkins and other farmers who had been swindled by him back North.

THE END.

It was not long after this that Nick had another case which interested him a great deal. It will be described in the next issue (No. 277) under the title: "Nick Carter and the Professor; or, Solving a Scientific Problem."



FUNNY STORIES

Get a hustle on you, boys! This contest is rapidly drawing to a close. Get a move on, or you will get left. It's been a great contest, and you don't want to throw away a good chance for a banjo, or some of the other prizes.

Here are a few side-splitters.

Three Lazy Men.

(By Roy Morris, New York.)

I went into a country store one day and heard three men talking. Their names were Jones, Johnson and Jayson.

"Well," Jayson was saying, "I've got five dollars that says I'm the laziest man around here."

"I'll bet five that I'm the laziest," said Johnson.

"Here, boys," said Jones, "I come in this game. I bet five that I'm the laziest."

The money was put up in the storekeeper's hands and the men tossed a penny to see which would tell first.

As it happened, Jayson was the first to tell. "Well," he said, "I'm too lazy to get up in the morning, and too lazy to go to bed at night, and I'm too lazy to eat."

Well, Johnson came next. He said:

"I'm too lazy to dress, I'm too lazy to smoke, I'm too lazy to light the lamps when it gets dark. In fact, I'm too lazy to walk."

"Well, boys," said Jones, "I'm too lazy to tell how lazy I am," and he won the bet.

Tea-Table Talk.

(By Wesley Van Tyne, N. Y.)

Peter: "Well, Tom, what news to-night?"

Tom: "Nothing much, only shoe makers are all making fortunes. Boots are the only things soled nowadays."

Frank: "I wish they could heel a corn as well as toe a boot."

Tom: "A last is no use! The modern bunyon hinders the pilgrim's progress."

Peter: "This is too much. Let me give you a conundrum: Why is a dentist opposed to the saying, 'Too thin?'"

Tilly: "Because he says, 'Tooth out.'"

Peter: "Most of the chemists I have heard of read Homer. They speak so often of oxide, you know."

Tilly: "But plumbers are very fond of singing; they are always saying to housekeepers, 'Pipe up!'"

Tom: "Then they ought to live in a flat."

Peter: "They would B sharp enough for you, even then."

Tilly: "Speaking of trades, I think carpenters do a

plane business; mostly on the square. Formerly they saw a good deal, but did not always auger well; boarded frequently, knew something about drills, were great bores, and preferred a clean shave. Of late they are more given to close reasoning, since they use striking arguments, and hit the nail on the head."

Tom: "Pretty good for Tilly. But I think grocers are the most independent men—they wouldn't give a fig for your opinions. Their paths are always flowery; their knowledge of currant values enables them to raisin their prices, and they know that the higher they put their goods up the fewer of them will go down. Besides, they are sure to egg-sell."

Peter: "For my part, I must say a word for butchers. They always try to make both ends meat, and though if anything should turnip (up) they don't carrot (at) all, but would serve you fowlly; still, their aims are not at all sell-fish."

Tom: "Don't forget the bakers; surely they are the best bread men of all."

Swearing in Church.

(By W. Ruth, Md.)

A boy named Willie Green had an uncle who was a preacher. Willie was an inveterate swearer.

His uncle said:

"Now, Willie, if you hear me swear at either of the two services on Sunday I will give you an apple pie."

Willie went in the morning and did not hear him swear. He went that night, and the preacher, waxing warm at the end of the sermon that night, said:

"By God I live, by God I die!"

And Willie from the back said:

"By God! you owe me an apple pie."

A Dog's Jewsharp.

(By Thos. Fitzpatrick, Mass.)

Two Irishmen went into a restaurant one day, and ordered something to eat. The waiter brought them some bread, meat, and apple dumpling. They ate everything but the apple dumpling. They did not know what it was.

There was a dog lying down beside one of the Irishmen, so he gave the dog some. The dumpling was hot and it burned the dog's mouth. He began hitting his mouth with his paw.

"Begorra, Pat, it's a dog's jewsharp!" exclaimed the Irishman.

What Was In Him.

(By C. A. Leavenworth, N. Y.)

"Children," said the teacher, while instructing the class in composition, "you should not attempt any flights of fancy, but simply be yourselves, and write what is in you. Do not imitate any other person's writings or draw inspiration from outside sources."

As a result of her advice, Johnny turned in the following composition:

"We shouild not attempt any flites of fansy, but rite what's in us. In me thare is my stomache, lungs, hart, liver, two apples, one piece of pie, one stick of lemon candy and my dinner."

How He Caught Cold.

(By Harold Burr, New York City.)

"Great Scott, old man, how on earth did you get that cold?" asked the man in the heavy overcoat.

"Why, it was this way," answered his friend, "you remember that dog of mine, don't you?"

"You mean Enza?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"We lost her the other night, and couldn't find her anywhere."

"Is that so? Too bad, but what has that got to do with your cold?"

"You'll see presently. Well, as I said, we lost her the other night, and couldn't find her anywhere. I had just fallen asleep last night when I suddenly heard a scratching on the front door. My first thought was that the house was being entered, but I dismissed this after a little sober thought on the subject, for I didn't have anything worth stealing in the first place, and besides it was pretty well known throughout the neighborhood what a savage dog Enza was, when she got her dander up, and I full well knew that there were mighty few burglars that would care to try conclusions with her so I dismissed this suspicion as unreasonable. Then I arose and crept softly to the door, clad only in my night clothes. With all due caution, I opened the door a few inches, when suddenly—"

"What?" asked his breathless companion.

"Influenza," came the solemn answer.

The other looked blankly at his friend for a moment, then walked away without a word.

Silas Crumper at a Dinner Party.

(By Frank Merrill, Milwaukee, Wis.)

"Oh, my feet, o-o-oh! These city shoes air no good tall. Wonder they wouldn't make 'em a bit wider."

Silas Crumper had waddled into the parlor where the

other folks had been waiting for him. He walked as if his path was strewn with eggs. Every few steps would bring an involuntary "oh!" from his lips. But he did not have long to tell his troubles. He was hustled outside and bundled into the carriage which was to carry them to the party.

After about twenty minutes' ride they arrived there.

They were admitted by a solemn-looking servant clothed in a black suit of clothes. Of course Silas at once thought him the master of the house. He went up to him, grasped his hand and began giving it an old-time shake.

"How de do, Mr. Gould?" (That was the name of the master of the house.)

"Eh?" gasped the servant. "I'm not Mr. Gould. I'm the servant."

Silas said not another word, but moved away. The people he had come with had gone upstairs, but Silas did not know that. He began to aimlessly wander about the lower floor. By some accident he got into the kitchen. When Mary the cook caught sight of him she began to laugh.

"Arrah, it looks like a monkey. Phfat is it yer after, Mr. Monkey?"

"I—I came to the party, and I'm lookin' for the people."

The cook's manner toward him changed instantly.

"Excuse me, sorr, but I thought ye war a tramp. Walter, show the gint to the rayciption room."

"Och, yaw, but maype you get a carriage."

Walter was a very fat German employed as gardener and was averse to any kind of work. This leading Silas to the people did not please him, for he would have to walk upstairs—a most dreadful job.

It took him a long time to get up, but it was lucky for Silas that the progress was not rapid, for his shoes pinched awfully.

Now they were at the doorway, which was covered with curtains. A large fur rug lay on the floor.

The German had left Silas and waddled downstairs.

Silas did not know how to make a polite entrance.

In some manner his feet got tangled in the rug. He lost his balance and felt himself falling. He grabbed the curtains and they came down with him. He landed in a confused heap, his head in the room and his feet in the hall.

Luckily for Silas, there was nobody in the room at the time, except an old servant, who helped him to his feet. The servant was laughing loudly when the host suddenly entered the room.

He stopped instantly.

"Phfat's yer name?" he whispered to Silas.

Silas told him.

"Mr. Silas Crumper," bawled the servant, as he bowed to Mr. Gould.

Mr. Gould became all smiles.

"Ah, Mr. Crumper, we missed you, and I was just coming out to see where you were."

He then conducted Silas into the room where the guests were assembled.

"Allow me to introduce Mr. Crumper."

Silas got red as a beet and made an awkward bow.

Then he retreated behind Mr. Gould.

But he was not through yet. Mr. Gould hustled him

over and introduced him to his daughter and son. Silas, when introduced, shook hands with Mr. Gould's son. He gripped so hard that the son had to ask him to let up. Needless to say, nobody else offered to shake hands with Silas that evening.

Silas eluded everybody for about an hour. Then he was cornered by Mr. Gould's daughter Margaret. Now Silas was decidedly nervous. He knew that if she once got going as most girls do she would never stop.

"Oh, Mr. Crumper, will you tell me something about your home? Charles Dudley Warner once lived, or, rather, was born there, and I'm naturally inquisitive about the place. I know you do not live in Pittsfield, but you live about five miles west of it. So you must have visited it. By the way, were you acquainted with Mr. Warner?"

"Wal, I thinks I oughter know him I gets all my horses shoed over to his place."

Margaret began to laugh.

"Oh, I don't think you understand who I mean. The person to whom I referred to is Mr. Warner, the writer. Have you ever read 'My Summer in a Garden,' Mr. Crumper?"

"What!" exclaimed Silas, "you writin' books a'ready?"

This was too much for Margaret, who was naturally full of fun. She let all her pent-up laughter come out. Of course, Silas now knew that he had made some blunder. He moved uneasily in his chair, and Margaret, noticing this, stopped laughing.

"Oh, Mr. Crumper, you did not understand me. 'My Summer in a Garden' was written by Mr. Warner. But a person can easily misinterpret that. Well, I see you are not acquainted with Warner, so we'll let him rest for this evening. Are you acquainted with any great composer of music, Bach, for instance?"

"Wall, yes. I know about Bach. He leads the village band. I kicked him out of our kitchen last summer, fur tryin' to kiss my darter Mary."

Margaret was laughing so much that she had to give up the conversation and excuse herself from the room.

Silas gave vent to a sigh of relief. He was once more out of the corner.

For the next half hour he was busy stepping on other people's toes, on ladies' trains and other small things like that. Then supper was announced. Silas had for a partner Margaret Gould, his former questioner. She put her arm through his. Silas' face got red and he looked uneasy. He tried to pull his arm away, but the mischievous Margaret would not let him.

"It's the usual thing, Mr. Crumper," she whispered to Silas.

By some accident Silas managed under the direction of Margaret to get through supper without any mistakes.

When he was through he calmly pulled out a pipe and some tobacco and proceeded to fill his smoker. But Margaret again saved him from a blunder. Next he tried to push his chair back so that it stood upon two legs. The floor was very slippery, and consequently Silas lay on the floor a moment later. Although it was not proper everybody at the table began to laugh.

Silas quickly got up and then got out of the room. He went upstairs to the other room, where the piano was.

Now, Silas when a young man had learned to play "Yankee Doodle" on the piano. Here was his chance. Nobody in the room. He went to the piano and began to play. Gradually, after playing it six or seven times he became so absorbed in it that he did not notice the folks who came in one by one. After the eighth time he stopped. A great round of applause followed.

Silas got up bewildered and retreated to a corner of the room behind some plants, where he could not be observed. After a while he fell asleep and as he dozes off we will leave him.

The Monkey and the Parrot.

(By Will L. Johnson, N. Y.)

Once a man named Jones kept a grocery and general store in a small town, and had two pets, a monkey—Mr. Sims, they called him—and a parrot.

They were both as mischievous as old Nick himself, and one day the man was called away on business, locking the store and leaving Mr. Sims and the parrot alone. Somehow, the monkey got loose from his cage, and opened polly's door, pulled her out and proceeded to have a lively time. First he pulled the plug out of the molasses barrel, and opened the kerosene can and let both mixtures run all over the floor.

Well, "Mr. Sims" and polly got in a lively scrap and smashed things in general. A lamp was overturned, the monkey rubbed polly into the kerosene and molasses, receiving a share of it himself. The monkey lost half of his tail, the parrot's feathers were all gone, and the two were the most comical specimens that any one ever saw.

Mr. Jones then came in, and seeing the disorder, stopped in the doorway, and stared. Polly was perched on the top of the coffee grinder, and Mr. Sims had his head in the cracker barrel, chattering like a magpie.

"Well," said polly, "what do you think of it? We've been having a devil of a time since you were gone away."

Mr. Jones sat down in a basket of eggs and roared until the buttons dropped off his coat.

Two Irishmen were viewing a large, old-fashioned muzzle-loading cannon, when one said:

"Pat, au' how do they make the cannons?"

"Oi dunno," said Pat, "unless they make the hole and pour the iron around it."

Leaving Her Breath Behind.

(By Clarence Hinkle, Okla.)

"Aunt Chloe, do you think you are a Christian?" asked the temperance clergyman of an old negro woman who was smoking a pipe.

"Yes, brudder, I 'spectz Ah is."

"Do you believe in the Bible?"

"Yes, brudder."

"Do you know that there is a passage in the Scriptures to the effect that nothing unclean shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven?"

"Yes, Ah've done heerd of it."

"Well, Chloe, you smoke, and you cannot enter the

Kingdom of Heaven, because there is nothing so unclean as the breath of a smoker. What do you say to that?"

"Why, Ah 'spect Ah'll leave ma breff behind whin Ah go thar!"

His First Lesson.

(By L. Voorhees, Cal.)

An Irish lad just from Ireland was asked by which route he came. He answered:

"Well, mum, I came by the Pisific route."

He was next asked to read the following verse:

"The cowslip and the heliotrope
Are the sweetest flowers that bloom;
While the mignonette and the honeysuckle
Breathe a sweet perfume."

He read:

"The cow slipped in the header bed,
One hot day in June.
While a million ants in a honeycomb
Will make a nice perfume."

Small Sailors.

(By Louis Freidberg, Pa.)

"Papa," said a little boy to his father, "are not sailors very small men?"

"No, my dear, what gave you such an idea? Some sailors are very large, powerful men. What makes you think they are small?"

"Because," said the little fellow, "I read of a sailor going to sleep on his watch."

Addition.

(By James Robin, Pa.)

Pat (in shoe store to clerk): "Give me a pair o' hobnail shoes."

Clerk: "What size?"

Pat: "Begorra, I nade No. 12."

Clerk: "Can't give 'em to you; haven't got 'em."

Pat: "Thin, bejabers, I'll take two pair o' 6's."

A New Trick.

(By Chas. Merritt, Me.)

Johnnie: "Say, Billy, did you hear about that trick I did last night?"

Billy: "No, what was it?"

Johnnie: "I was doing one with a cent and swallowed it. The doctor came and made me cough up two dollars."

A New Contagion.

(By Vivian O. Brack, Ark.)

Not a great many years ago a Dutchman came over to America. He did not know the customs of the Methodist religion.

At a house out in the country the Methodists were holding prayer-meeting. The people that lived in the house always took strangers. The Dutchman called in and was received with welcome.

An old man began to pray, and the rest of the people began to groan, and go on as they always do.

The Dutchman did not know what to do, but he knelt.

The man next him began to groan and say "amen," so the Dutchman said to the man:

"Is yer wife sick?"

The man shook his head.

"Vell, is der baby sick?"

The man shook his head.

"Vell, den, is yer sick yerself?"

"No," said the man, "we are Methodists, and it's our custom to groan and—"

With this the Dutchman jumped up and ran out of the house.

He went up the road and in about twenty minutes came to another house. He went in and knocked on the door. It was opened and a man said:

"What do ye want, my friend?"

"Vill yer dake me in fer ter night?"

"No, we don't take no strangers. Which way did ye come from?"

"Dat vay," said the Dutchman, pointing toward the house he had just come from.

"Well, why didn't ye stop thar?"

"I did," said the Dutchman. "And dey all vos haf der methodist so bad dat vos not lif till der morning."

A Schoolboy's Composition on Corns.

(By Louis Herzog, Md.)

Corns are of two kinds—vegetable and animal. Vegetable corn grows on rows and animal corn grows on toes. There are several kinds of corns: There is the unicorn, the capricorn, popcorn, corndodgers, field corn and the corn which is the corn your feet feel most.

Corns have kernels, and some colonels have corns. Vegetable corn grows on the ears, but the animal corn grows on the feet at the other end of the body. Another kind of corn is the acorn. This grows on oaks. The acorn is the corn with an indefinite article added. Try it and see. Many a man when he has a corn wishes it was an acorn.

Folks that have corns sometimes send for the doctor, and if the doctor is corned himself he probably won't do as well as if he isn't. The doctor says that corns are produced by tight boots and shoes, which is probably the reason when a man is tight they say he is corned.

If a farmer manages well, he can get a good deal of corn on an acre, but I know of a farmer that has the corn that makes the biggest acher on the farm. The bigger crop of vegetable corn a man raises the better he likes it; the bigger crop of animal corn he raises, the better he does not like it. Another kind of corn is the corn dodger. The way it is made is very simple, and it is as follows—that is, if you want to know: You go along the street and meet a man you know has a corn, and a rough character; then you step on the toe that has the corn on it, and see if you don't have occasion to dodge. In that way you will find out what a corn dodger is.

Flashes of Wit.

(By Willie Friedman, Ga.)

PERTINENT AND IMPERTINENT.

New School Director (attempting to address the children): "Boys, I am not much of a speechmaker, but I have several little things in my head I am trying to get rid of—"

Small Boy (in rear): "Try a finetooth comb!"

SILENCE IS GOLDEN.

Son: "Daddy, whar did de fust chicken come frum?"

Father: "Nebber yo' mine askin' irreligious questions. An' anudder t'ing. When Pawhson Thompson comes heah fuh dinnah nex' Sunday, doan' yo' t'ink yo habs toe asks whar dat chicken cum frum, eider. Yo heah me?"

WASTE OF WORDS.

Teacher: "Now, Tommy, suppose you had two apples, and you gave another boy his choice of them, you would tell him to take the bigger one, wouldn't you, Tommy?"

Tommy: "No, mum."

Teacher: "Why."

Tommy: "'Cos twouldn't be necessary."

WHAT ELSE COULD IT HAVE BEEN?

Papa: "Where's my umbrella? I'm sure I put it in the hallstand with the others last evening."

Willie: "I guess Alice's beau took it when he went home last night."

Alice: "Why, Willie? The idea!"

Willie: "Well, when he was saying good-night to you I heard him say, I'm going to steal just one."

Stamp and Coin Department.

CORRESPONDENCE.

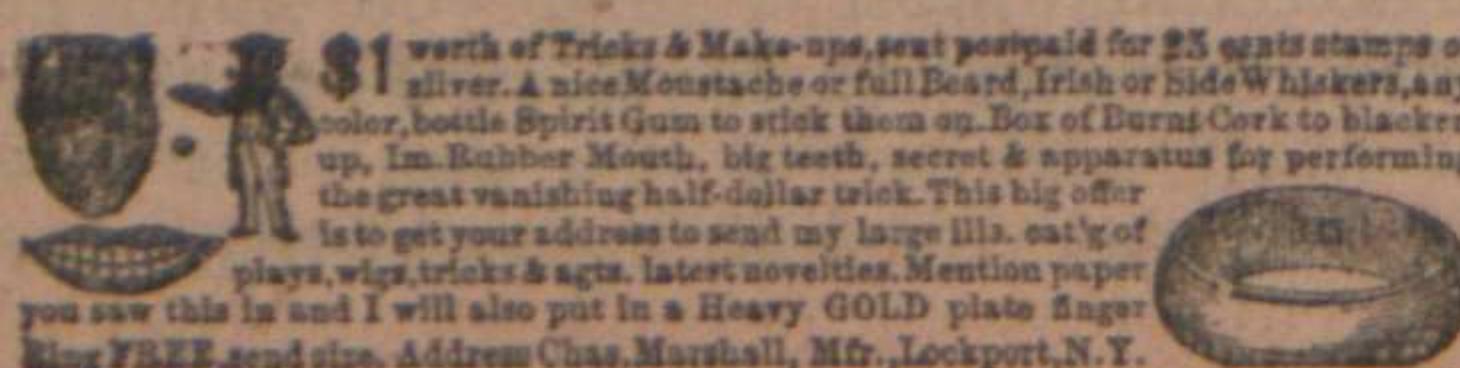
C. W. B.—There is no premium whatever upon your cent.

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F. Ziblay.—Some stamps which have been used are very valuable. The Scott Stamp and Coin Co., New York.

J. H. D., Jr.—There is no premium on any of your coins. Your bill is a great curiosity in its way, but it is doubtful whether it has any intrinsic value. A great many of the bills were issued and they are almost all at present in the hands of collectors.



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A SPLENDID PRIZE CONTEST.

It is to Laugh!

Of course you all like funny stories—the kind you have been reading lately in the NICK CARTER WEEKLY. If you can write any like them send them in, that is if you want

A FIRST RATE UP-TO-DATE BANJO,
A SPLENDID ALL-WOOL SWEATER,
OR LONG DISTANCE MEGAPHONES.

3 First Prizes

The three boys who send in the three funniest stories will each receive a first-class banjo. A beautiful instrument. Perfect and up-to-date in every detail. These banjos are warranted in every particular. They have 11-inch calf heads, walnut necks and veneered finger boards, with celluloid inlaid position dots, raised frets, twenty-four nickel brackets and wired edge. These instruments can be easily mastered, and every boy should jump at the opportunity to win one.

5 Second Prizes

The five boys who send us the next funniest stories will each receive a Spalding all-wool sweater. Any color you choose. Guaranteed all wool and full shaped to the body and arms.

10 Third Prizes

The ten boys who send us the next funniest stories will receive a Spalding 12-inch "Long Distance" Megaphone, capable of carrying the sound of the human voice two miles.

HERE ARE THE DIRECTIONS:

This contest will close May 1st. Remember, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name.

To become a contestant for these prizes you must cut out the Prize Contest Coupon printed herewith; fill it out properly, and send it to NICK CARTER WEEKLY, care of Street & Smith, 238 William Street, New York City, together with your story. No story will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

COUPON.

Nick Carter Weekly Prize Contest No 2.

Date..... 1902

Name.....

City or Town.....

State.....

Title of Story.....

Amateur Detective Work.

Here are the first amateur detectives to put in an appearance. They are Arthur Longwell, of Great Neck, Long Island, and Frankwill Russel, of Springfield, Ohio. We welcome them into the "Nick Carter Amateur Detective Circle." Their letters arrived here over a week ago, and we have received a great many others from amateur detectives since, but we have not as yet had space to print them in. Here are the first two letters, boys. Read them.

EDITOR NICK CARTER WEEKLY—

Dear Sir: I have just finished reading for the second time "Nick Carter in the Convict Gang; or, Ida Jones to the Rescue." It is a good story, and shows Nick's wonderful daring and ability.

From the moment that Nick entered the presence of the Governor of Perm I began to suspect that the governor was implicated with the Nihilists.

Nick himself suspected the same thing. You see, the references in the dispatches seized by the Carters from the Nihilists at Moscow mentioned the governor. That set me thinking.

I said to myself, "Probably the head of the Nihilists in Perm is some one very close to the governor."

Then when the thief who was caught by Nick was set free by the policeman I began to think harder than ever.

I was dreadfully puzzled and I tried to discover what it all meant. I tried in vain, however, and it was as great a puzzle to me as ever until Nick began to talk with the governor. Then the solution of the mystery began to dawn upon me. As the governor began to show his true character it became clearer and clearer. All honor is due to Ida Jones for her daring rescue of Nick.

It was a close call for Nick, but Ida—brave girl that she is—got there in time, and the Russians were fooled.

With three cheers for Chick, Patsy and Ida, and three cheers and a tiger for Nick himself, I close.

Yours truly,

Great Neck, Long Island. ARTHUR LONGWELL.

You show good sense, Arthur, in your letter. You did very well in your attempt to solve the mystery.

Try again sometime.

Here is another good letter:

EDITOR NICK CARTER WEEKLY—

Dear Sir: In reading the story of "Nick Carter's Ocean Chase" I was interested very much in my guesses as to who the thief was. At first I had a little suspicion of the Roumelian minister himself, but as I read on I began to form an unfavorable impression of Palog.

When he told how he procured the diamond I began to think hard.

"That man," I said to myself, "is evidently bad at heart. He stole the diamond from the poor natives. What was to hinder him from stealing the diamond from his government?"

Of course there was no proof, but still I had a lurking suspicion of him. The only foundation for my suspicion was the knowledge that Palog was dishonest.

As the story showed, I was right in my suspicion. Do you not consider that I did good detective work?

Yours truly,

Springfield, Ohio.

FRANKWILL RUSSEL.

In that case you were right, Frank, but your plan would not work every time. You ought to have had something more to base your suspicion on before you decided that Palog was the guilty man.

BASEBALL'S THE THING!

GET INTO THE GAME, BOYS!

Don't Miss Reading

FRANK MERRIWELL'S

Latest and Best Story which commences in Boys of America No. 31,
out April 17th, next, entitled

The Record-Breakers of the Diamond:

OR,

THE ALL-STARS' BASEBALL TOUR.

A Rattling Tale of the All-Star Athletic Club's Adventures On and Off the Diamond.

Few tales have met with the enthusiastic approval that greeted Frank Merriwell's great story, "The All-Star Athletic Club; or, The Boys Who Couldn't Be Downed," that appeared recently in BOYS OF AMERICA. "Tell us more of the All-Stars" was the cry of thousands of readers as that crack-a-jack story drew to its close. This, Frank Merriwell has done in his new baseball story, "The Record-Breakers of the Diamond." The All-Stars' exciting baseball games, their varied adventures, the suspected treachery of one of their members, etc., etc., go to make this tale the banner story of the year. Will you miss it?

Be sure to get No. 31, BOYS OF AMERICA, containing the opening installment of this rattling baseball story, written exclusively for BOYS OF AMERICA by Frank Merriwell, the Celebrated Yale Athlete.

This number will be on sale at all newsdealers on and after Thursday, April 17th, next.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

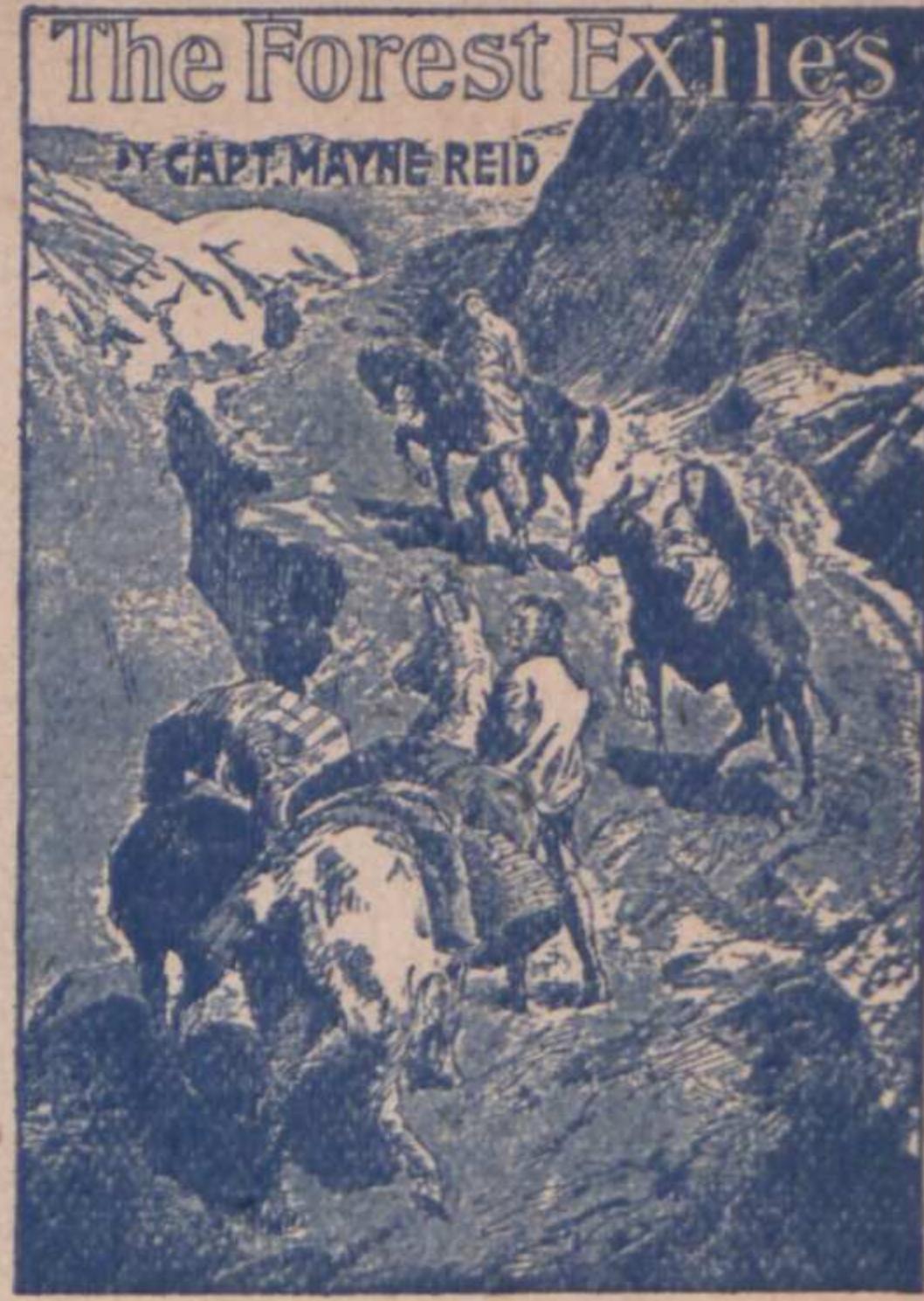
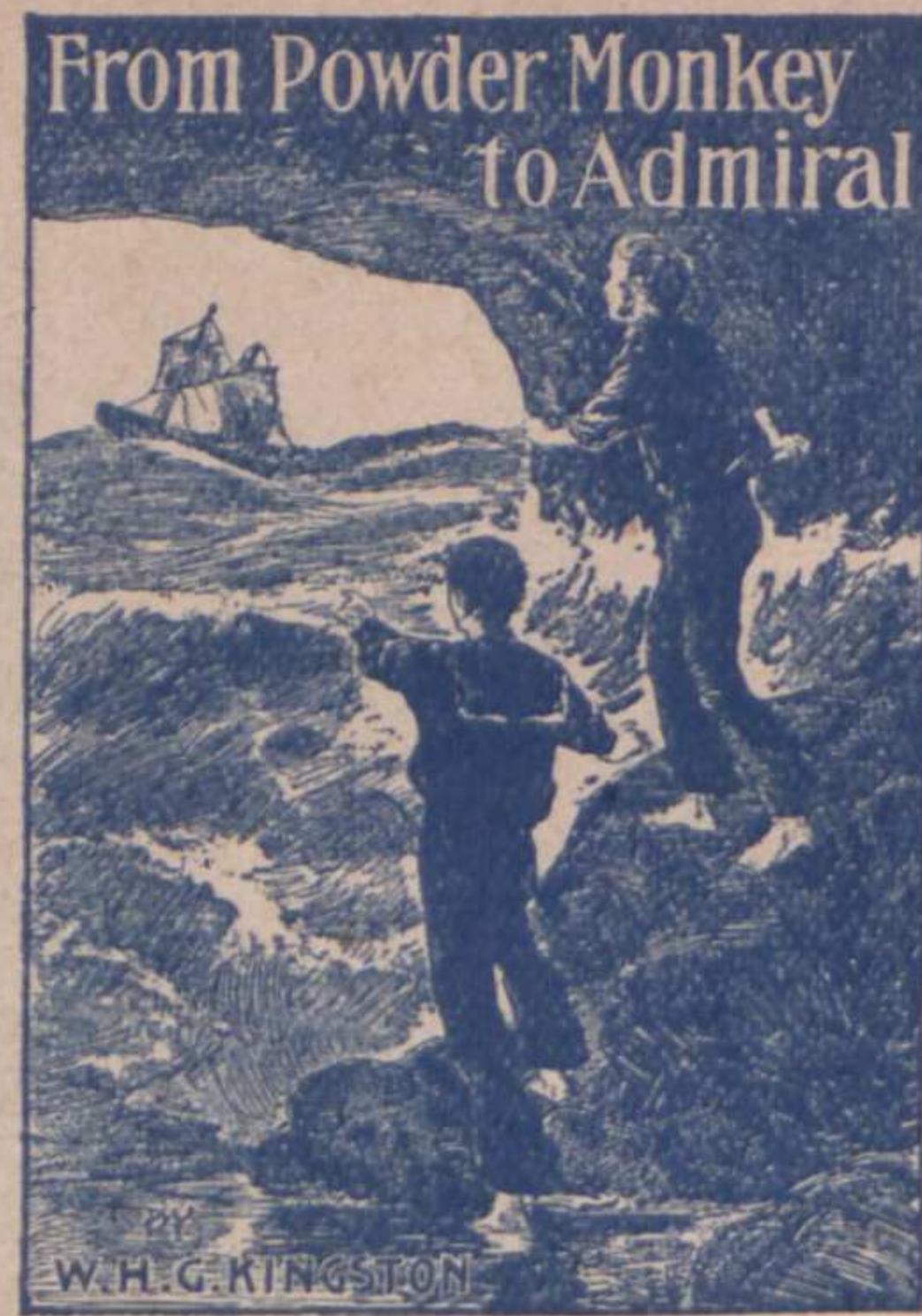
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